the weekly
Standard

MARCH 26, 2007 $3.95

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FRED BARNES • WILLIAM KRISTOL

And the Band Plays On

MATT LABASH on the struggle to save the soul of New Orleans

Tuba Phil Frazier of the Rebirth Brass Band

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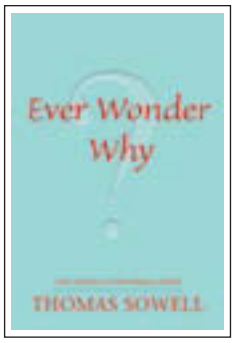
From Hoover Press's best-selling author Thomas Sowell



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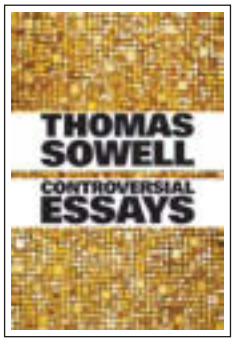

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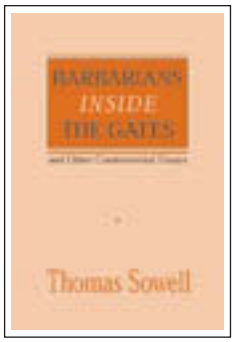

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Rankled by Rudy

When it comes to sniffing out trends, The Scrapbook is a virtual basset hound. And without trying too hard, we have detected one that ought to please Rudy Giuliani, at least. With the 2008 campaign barely under way, America's Mayor has managed to throw the chattering classes into full brow-furrowing mode.

Exhibit number one: A recent column in *Newsweek* by Jonathan Alter to the effect that, while Giuliani "was a good mayor in many ways," his decisive manner, short fuse, and general disinclination to suffer fools gladly "is out of sync with history's pendulum." That's because our next president, according to Alter, "must be a tough-minded but flexible and humble chief executive with a talent for building bridges, not burning them."

Here at The Scrapbook we'd be content with a president who avoids pain-inducing journalistic clichés about burning and building bridges. But more to the point: How does Alter know about America's need for a flexible-but-humble chief executive after 2008? Answer: Because it's his own pendulum Giuliani's out of sync with.

Exhibit number two: An op-ed column in the March 6 *Washington Post* by Jonathan Capehart, which revealed that Capehart had been a columnist at the *New York Daily News* in 1999, and then-Mayor Giuliani called him up one morning to berate him for 10 minutes about a column Capehart had written. "His skin-peeling tirades against reporters, politicians, community leaders, perceived enemies and those deemed too weak to fight City Hall were legendary," wrote Capehart. "Now it was my turn." The horror.

Either Giuliani doesn't appeal to sensitive journalists named Jonathan, or perhaps there was a good reason for the mayor's phone call. The idea of an American president occasionally directing skin-peeling tirades at, say, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad or Pyongyang's Dear Leader—or even at a hostile columnist—might strike many voters as refreshing, not disturbing.

So much for the Washington Post Company. A few days later, as if on cue, Joyce Purnick of the *New York Times* weighed in with a thoughtful, gosh-darn profound Sunday morning essay—"Divining the New Moral Code"—which acknowledged that it's "old news that divorce is no longer disqualifying for a [presidential] candidate," but speculated that, perhaps, other private details (adultery, family tension, multiple marriages) "could spell trouble for Mr. Giuliani."

Well, the *Times* is entitled to hope, isn't it? For the meaning of this media micro-trend isn't hard to deduce: Journalists are distinctly annoyed that a pro-choice, gay-friendly, thrice-married candidate (normally just their kind of demographic) seems to enjoy Republican support, including among some religious conservatives, and are eager to accuse him of just about anything (terrible temper, contempt for reporters), no matter how preposterous, to persuade a skeptical public that he shouldn't be president. In The Scrapbook's opinion, this is evidence either of Giuliani's potential strength as a candidate or the giant chip that rests on the shoulders of some political journalists.

In the meantime, as the *Times* winds up for the next pitch, stay tuned for the Maureen Dowd column that debuts a new sorority-house nickname for Giuliani, and the Frank Rich analysis that draws the connection between the ex-mayor's onetime combover and a classic episode of "Mr. Ed." ♦

Always Look on the Dark Side . . .

The Scrapbook may have nattered on too much recently about the media's negative coverage of the Iraq war. So we're outsourcing this week's complaining to *Slate*'s inimitable Mickey Kaus.

Notes Kaus: "U.S. military deaths in Iraq have apparently declined by about 20% since the 'surge' began. It would be a caricature of [mainstream media] behavior if the *New York Times*, instead of simply reporting this potentially good news, first constructed some bad news to swaddle it in, right? From [the March 16] *Times*:

> The heightened American street presence may already have contributed to an increase in the percentage of American deaths that occur in Baghdad.
>
> Over all, the number of American soldiers killed in Iraq from hostilities since Feb. 14, the start of the new Baghdad security plan, fell to 66, from 87 in the previous four weeks.
>
> But with more soldiers in the capital on patrol and in the neighborhood garrisons, a higher proportion of the American deaths have occurred in Baghdad—36 percent after Feb. 14 compared with 24 percent in the previous four weeks. Also over the past four weeks, a higher proportion of military deaths from roadside bombs have occurred in Baghdad—45 percent compared with 39 percent.

"Soldiers," Kaus points out, "presumably get attacked where they are, not where they aren't. If we deploy more soldiers in Baghdad more soldiers will presumably be attacked, and killed, in Baghdad. I don't see why that in itself is bad news, or even news news, if the overall casualty level is declining. . . . There will probably be genuine bad

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military news to report from Baghdad soon enough. Does the *NYT* have to make some up before then?" Couldn't have said it better ourselves. ♦

Ted Koppel Is Making Sense

The former *Nightline* host is interviewed by Tim Russert on *Meet the Press*, March 11:

KOPPEL: "I made a little note here of something that [U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay] Khalilzad said to you a moment ago. He said the region will not be stable until Iraq is stabilized. It's the one thing nobody talks about. Everyone is concerned about the United States being in the middle of a civil war inside Iraq, but they forget about the fact that, if U.S. troops were to pull out of Iraq, that civil war could become a regional war between the Sunnis and Shia. And the region, just in case anyone has forgotten, is the Persian Gulf, where we get most of our oil and, you and I have talked about this before, natural gas. So the idea of pulling out of there and letting the region—I mean, letting the national civil war expand into a regional civil war, is something the United States cannot allow to happen. . . .

"If you look back at the elements of the war against terrorism, that war was going on and has been going on for the past 24 years. We just didn't connect the dots. Twenty-four years ago, the precursors of Hezbollah blew up the U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, Lebanon. That was 1983, 241 Americans killed. In the interim, between then and now, you had two attacks on the World Trade Center, you had the blowing up of Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, you had the attempt to blow up the U.S.S. *Cole*, you had the bombing of the two U.S. embassies in East Africa. This war's already been going on for 24 years. We were just a little bit slow to recognize it." ♦

Obama Messiah Watch

"On the question of inner-city poverty and dysfunction, Obama proposes a suite of orthodox solutions—early childhood education, after-school and mentoring programs, efforts to teach young parents how to be parents. But he also emphasizes personal responsibility: 'The framework that tends to be set up in Washington—which is either the problem is not enough money and not enough government programs, or the problem is a culture of poverty and not enough emphasis on traditional values—presents a false choice.'

"That's the way Obama talks, by the way, in sinuous but precise sentences that practically diagram themselves as they go along."

—*Eugene Robinson*,
Washington Post, *March 13, 2007*

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Casual

Metsomania Remembered

It will be spring soon and, more to the point, baseball season. This knowledge brings me some joy and not a little anxiety, due to the birth of my son almost a year ago. I'll see him playing on the rug or, now that his teeth are coming in, chewing on the coffee table, a CD case, or, last week, an actual rock, and the thought will hit me: Shoot, he's going to expect me to know about baseball.

As a nine-year-old, I knew a lot about the subject. I'd sit on the front stoop of my house around 6:30 A.M., trying to will myself onto a bicycle to deliver 20 or 30 copies of *Newsday* to local subscribers. I hated this job. Pay was crummy, the hours stunk, and the newspaper bag was so weighted as to send me, more than once, tumbling head over wheels. Also, the guy in charge was constantly upping the number of papers he delivered to my stoop, in what I thought was a crooked attempt to inflate the number of subscribers in the area. (As a matter of fact, *Newsday* did get into trouble for something like this not long ago.)

Fortunately, distraction was near at hand in the sports pages. Under the influence of a friend and his optimistic family, I'd become a Mets fan. This was Queens, after all; but the Mets had been the worst team in the National League. My second grade teacher, Sister Dominic, was a Mets fan, and her brand of classroom tyranny seemed at one with the all-sacrifice, no-rewards life of a true Mets partisan. The Mets had won the World Series in 1969, but this was a distant, almost mythical instance of unlikely triumph, one that had long since given way to the deadening routine of likely defeat.

But just as I was beginning my career in the news business, Darryl Strawberry and Doc Gooden were beginning their careers with the Mets. Oh, the wonder of the back sports page as it announced every few days how many strikeouts Gooden had achieved, sometimes with K's almost as large as the page itself. While my customers were wondering where their papers were, I was reading about the most recent game, and then enjoying a second, repetitive, story about the most recent game. I'd ponder the league rankings and sometimes even read an article about those lowly Yankees over in the Bronx.

The rest is well-known baseball history. Doc Gooden, along with several other terrific players, carried the Mets to World Series victory in 1986. This swift rise to greatness was accompanied and then followed by much turmoil, as drugging, boozing, and brawling corroded the Mets image of baseball excellence. At the start of the 1987 season Doc Gooden was in rehab.

Having started as a Mets fan when they were an awful but likable team, I was increasingly angry that they could not behave in a manner becoming to a great team. "Ya gotta believe" was one of their slogans. Well, within a few seasons, I didn't, not anymore. For good reason, they were soon being called "the worst team money could buy," and I had stopped delivering the newspaper. My customers were no doubt relieved.

Lately baseball has come back into my life. It started with some minor league games in Prince William County, Virginia. Then I took more than a passing, though not quite a rooting, interest in the new Washington Nationals. Also, I resumed the habit of watching playoffs and World Series games.

Currently, I am an example of that hated species, the fair-weather fan, interested in the good times and just a little too busy for the bad times. Also, I am more or less without a club, which in the monotheistic world of baseball fans amounts to heresy. Worse, there are baseball caps in my house that I wear to cover up my pillow-head, bearing the logos of teams I don't root for—and this doesn't bother me.

Except when I think about my son. For good or ill, many a lesson in character is taught through sports. I want to be at his side commending patience in adversity when our team is in a slump, and grace under pressure when a game, or a series, or a season, or a career, is on the line. All the legitimate examples and maddening clichés about integrity and hard work that baseball provides I want at my disposal as a father.

This season, I'll try to be a better fan—rooting for whom I'm not sure. But for starters, maybe I'll swing by the baby store to see if they sell any teething toys in the shape of a baseball.

David Skinner

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Cross With W&M

Evidently the College of William and Mary saw only a glimmer of light as they didn't return the cross to its rightful place on the altar, but rather to a glass case (The Scrapbook, March 19). Crosses belong on altars, not as an exhibit in a glass case to be an object of curiosity rather than the symbol of the Christian faith, the faith that established William and Mary.

Rev. Dr. W.R. Gardiner
Montross, Va.

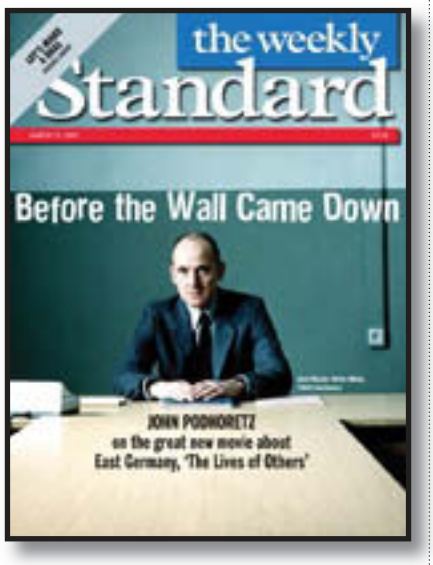
I Back Bach

In "Bach to the Future" (Feb. 26), George B. Stauffer writes, "There is also the question of precisely what it is about Bach's works that makes them so appealing to modern audiences." One reason even modern audiences appreciate Bach's musical work is that his style was magnificent yet well ordered.

From Bach's Mass in B Minor and his "Saint Matthew Passion," to a toccata and fugue in every key imaginable, the composer's grand brilliance is undeniable. Bach took his music to new levels, with chords and power that fill every arch of the churches for which they were composed. And Bach avoided the disorder of modernist tricks such as ever-changing volumes and tempos, dissonance, and the schmaltz that unfortunately has dominated classical music since the early 1800s.

There is another reason modern audiences enjoy Bach's music: It is difficult to find live. Many orchestras, including the National Symphony Orchestra, perform 19th- and 20th-century works while almost always neglecting the masters of earlier generations. The "been there, done that" attitude of conductors and musical directors results in a critical shortage of quality choral and instrumental music before the Romantic period. We should not be surprised audiences love J.S. Bach. The man was a genius. Would that more choirs and orchestras comprehended this.

Kenneth J. Wolfe
Alexandria, Va.



Is It Five O'Clock Yet?

Regarding Victorino Matus's "I'll Take Manhattan" (March 12): A Rob Roy doesn't require generic "whiskey"; it requires Scotch, preferably single malt. A Manhattan does not include bourbon, it employs American rye whiskey, which by legal definition is at least 51 percent rye, whereas bourbon is at least 51 percent corn (there are other differences, but that's the important one). Angostura, which is one brand among many (Peychaud's, Fee Bros., etc.), is not required in either recipe. So while including bitters in the recipe is correct, the inclusion of "Angostura" reads like an advertisement—akin to saying a Manhattan may only be made with Cinzano vermouth. Last, a martini is gin, and only gin. What most people know as a vodka martini is more accurately called a Kangaroo Cocktail. Alas, few bartenders actually know that, so they end up bastardizing a great drink.

Dave Wilkinson
Houston, Tex.

Sensitivity Spelling

Regarding The Scrapbook's "Oh, Kolkata!" (March 5): Why stop at changing the spelling of Calcutta? People outside of Oregon maliciously call the state "or-a-gawn" while the natives call it "or-a-gun." South Dakotans insist on calling their capital "peer" while the rest of us rudely call it "pee-air." All maps sold outside of those locales should be changed to reflect the correct pronunciation. Why show Bengalis the respect that we're unwilling to show our fellow Americans?

Drew Hymer
Medford, Ore.

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the weekly Standard

Progress There, Idiocy Here

In order to preserve the cosmic harmony, it seems the gods insist that good news in one place be offset by misfortune elsewhere. It may well be that Gen. David Petraeus is going to lead us to victory in Iraq. He is certainly off to a good start. If the karmic price of success in Iraq is utter embarrassment for senior Bush officials in Washington, D.C.—well, in our judgment, the trade-off is worth it. The world will surely note our success or failure in Iraq. It will not long remember the gang that couldn't shoot straight at the Justice Department—or, for that matter, the antics of congressional Democrats—unless either so weakens the administration as to undercut our mission in Iraq.

Obviously, it's too early to say anything more definitive than that there are real signs of progress in Baghdad. The cocksure defeatism of war critics of two months ago, when the surge was announced, does seem to have been misplaced. The latest *Iraq Update* by Kimberly Kagan (available at *weeklystandard.com*) summarizes the early effects of the new strategy backed up by, as yet, just one additional U.S. brigade deployed in theater (with more to be added in the coming weeks):

> This "rolling surge" focuses forces on a handful of neighborhoods in Baghdad, and attempts to expand security out from those neighborhoods. . . . A big advantage of a "rolling surge" is that the population and the enemy sense the continuous pressure of ever-increasing forces. Iraqis have not seen such a prolonged and continuous planned increase of U.S. forces before. . . . The continued, increasing presence of U.S. forces appears to be having an important psychological, as well as practical, effect on the enemy and the people of Iraq. . . . [Meanwhile] in Ramadi, in the belt south of Baghdad stretching from Yusifiyah to Salman Pak, and northeast in Diyala Province, . . . U.S. and Iraqi forces have deprived al Qaeda of the initiative.

This sense of momentum is confirmed by many other reports in the media, and from Americans and Iraqis on the ground.

But back in Washington, congressional Democrats are still mired in the fall of 2006 and seem determined to be as irresponsible as ever. They're being beaten back—in part thanks to the fighting spirit of stalwart congressional Republicans. Last week, the Senate defeated a resolution that would have restricted the use of U.S. troops in Iraq and set March 31, 2008, as a target date for removing U.S. forces from combat.

On the same day, on a mostly party-line vote, the House Appropriations Committee reported out the Democratic version of a supplemental appropriations bill for the war. It was an odd piece of legislation—an appropriation to fight a war replete with provisions intended to ensure we lose it.

Here's what the Democratic legislation does, according to the *Washington Post*: "Under the House bill, the Iraqi government would have to meet strict benchmarks. . . . If by July 1 the president could not certify any progress, U.S. troops would begin leaving Iraq, to be out before the end of this year. If Bush did certify progress, the Iraqi government would have until Oct. 1 to meet the benchmarks, or troops would begin withdrawing then. In any case, withdrawals would have to begin by March 1, 2008, and conclude by the end of that summer."

Got that? Oh yes, in addition to the arbitrary timelines for the removal of troops, there's pork. As the *Post* explains, "Included in the legislation is a lot of money to help win support. The price tag exceeds the president's war request by $24 billion." Some of the extra money goes to bail out spinach farmers hurt by E. coli, to pay for peanut storage, and to provide additional office space for the lawmakers themselves. So much for an emergency war appropriations bill.

The legislation may collapse on the floor of the House this week. It certainly deserves to. Republicans can insist on a clean supplemental—no timelines to reassure the enemy that if they just hang on, we'll be gone before long, and no pork. They can win this fight—and if they do, combined with progress in Iraq, the lasting news from March 2007 will not be Bush administration haplessness; it will be that we are on the way to success in Iraq.

—*William Kristol*

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Bush Turns the Other Cheek

Alas.

BY FRED BARNES

When President Bush, at the tail end of his Latin American trip last week, got around to commenting on the controversy over eight fired U.S. attorneys, he was calm, reasonable, and even a bit apologetic. Little good it did him. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid said the Bush administration was guilty of "immoral" and "illegal" behavior. The next day, Senator Chuck Schumer of New York responded with some of his usual hyperbole. "This is the worst crisis of confidence at the Department of Justice that I have seen in my time in the Senate. It is a crisis of confidence, a crisis of credibility, and a crisis of management."

Schumer may be a partisan hack, but as the Democratic point-man on the firings, he is carrying the day. He guided Democrats as they transformed the perfectly legal and quite normal removal of federal prosecutors into a raging scandal. They've done this for raw political reasons: to mortify and cripple the president. And Bush, with his timidity in the face of Democratic accusations, has let them. He hasn't fought back. He's become an enabler.

And look what he's enabled! By not instantly and unflinchingly denouncing the Democratic offensive for what it is, an entirely bogus attack on his administration, he has allowed a mere flap to get out of hand. And now he faces unpleasant decisions over whether to fire Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and permit Democrats to haul Karl Rove, his senior adviser, before a congressional committee. Should he do either, his administration will be tremendously weakened and his presidency stained.

So there's a crisis, but not the one Schumer talked about. It's a crisis of presidential leadership. Bush excels as leader of his country. He is unrelenting in pursuing the war on Islamic terrorists, and he performed admirably on his recent tour of Latin America. But he's also responsible for leading—and defending—his administration and the Republican party. He's failing in both of these duties.

The way Washington works in 2007, with Democrats in control of Congress, being nice and conciliatory, as Bush has been, is counterproductive. It's never reciprocated.

Bush needs to fight back, rhetorically and otherwise, without hesitation and without fear that his critics will end up even more opposed to his policies. The way Washington works in 2007, with Democrats in control of Congress, makes this necessary. Being nice and conciliatory, as Bush has been, is counterproductive. It's never reciprocated. Rather, it encourages his Democratic foes to be even more belligerent and discourages his Republican allies.

From the earliest days of the Bush presidency, his advisers have debated whether he should be nice or tough. On one side are what an aide calls "the communicators." They want the president to speak kindly to Congress, the aide says, and try to mollify not only Democrats but also "the *New York Times* and [ABC anchor] George Stephanopoulos." The tough guys believe Bush should be as hard-hitting on Congress as he is when discussing the war on terror. As best I can tell, counselor Dan Bartlett favors the gentler approach, Rove and Vice President Cheney the harder line.

The communicators are winning. A White House official says the president's instinct is not to denounce opponents. This is not necessarily because he thinks politeness will curry favor with Democrats. It's just Bush's style. Another official says Bush "likes to set a tone," a high one. Still another aide says Bush dislikes questioning an opponent's motives.

This tendency may have been unobjectionable when Republicans ran Congress, but it is something else today. Now the Washington system works like this: A phony controversy that isn't stamped out immediately and harshly can balloon into a real controversy or scandal. "If you don't come up very aggressively and push back, it takes on a life of its own," says Republican senator John Thune of South Dakota. "That's what's happened here."

The model Bush should have followed from the get-go is that of Oliver North. Rather than apologize, as Bush has, North went after the real outrage: the congressional Iran-contra committee itself. He pushed back furiously, thrilled his allies, and demoralized his enemies. The committee, knocked on its heels, never recovered.

What should Bush have said when Democrats first took after the firings? Something like this: "It's an outrage that Democrats would attack, solely for political gain, a president's con-

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stitutional authority to name U.S. attorneys and remove them from office. President Clinton removed all 93 federal prosecutors in 1993, as was his right. I have removed 8, none of them for political reasons. That Democrats are now willing to play political games with our criminal justice system is a shame, and I will vigorously oppose their efforts."

This is what's known as a shot across the bow. It probably wouldn't have stopped Democrats in their tracks. But they would have known they were in for a fight if they tried to use the firings as a political weapon.

Instead, the Democrats' attacks have gone virtually unanswered. This has prompted them to step up their demands for administration witnesses at congressional show trials and to begin turning policy differences into criminal violations. Bush has not given his allies anything or anyone to rally around. It's small wonder, then, that Republicans have begun dropping off and calling for Gonzales's ouster.

The president's failure to defend his administration has led to trouble before, notably when the White House declined to stand behind the "16 words" about Saddam Hussein's search for uranium in Africa in Bush's 2003 State of the Union address. This led ultimately to the CIA leak case and the prosecution of Scooter Libby.

Trouble will visit Bush again and again if he does not stand up to the Democrats. He could begin by informing them that they won't get the scalp of Gonzales, Rove, or anyone else. Following that, he could tell Democrats to quit wasting their time on antiwar resolutions and other issues (card check, stem cells, etc.) that will never become law and concentrate on issues like immigration and education that may. He could battle noisily for confirmation of one or two or three appeals court nominees. He could pardon Libby. Republicans would be inspired. Administration officials would feel protected. And if Reid and Schumer fume, so what? ♦

A Defamation Is Born

Another left-wing Iraq obsession.

BY LISA SCHIFFREN

On February 4, 2005, an Italian journalist named Giuliana Sgrena was captured and held hostage by a group of angry Muslims in Iraq. After a month of none too covert negotiating by the Italian government, she was released to a high-ranking member of the Italian intelligence service. How many Western journalists have been captured and/or killed to date in the Islamic world? The only thing that would make this incident memorable was its macabre ending: As their car sped through the dark to the Baghdad airport, they declined to stop for a U.S. military roadblock, whereupon U.S. soldiers fired, killing the spook, who was sitting in the back seat with Sgrena. She took a bullet to the shoulder.

Now it's two years later. Sgrena has recovered from her injuries and written a book about the experience. Her *Friendly Fire: The Remarkable Story of a Journalist Kidnapped in Iraq, Rescued by an Italian Secret Service Agent, and Shot by U.S. Forces* has just been published by Haymarket Books, of which you have probably never heard. Describing their mission, the publishers quote the man himself: "As Karl Marx said, 'The philosophers have merely interpreted the world; the point however is to change it.'" As it happens, Sgrena is on the staff of an unapologetically Communist newspaper called *Il Manifesto*. So now you can guess where this story is going.

Last week, I went to the first stop on Sgrena's book tour at the Judson Memorial Church, on the south side of Washington Square Park, in what used to be picturesque, radical, arty Greenwich Village—but now is merely the campus of New York University. The talk was sponsored by a radical media group called Democracy Now!, which, like Haymarket and *Il Manifesto*, fiercely opposes the Iraq war and, indeed, pretty much everything else the U.S. government is doing abroad and at home.

The unusually well-lit room was filled with about 125 people—of whom maybe a handful were grad students. The preponderance were middle-aged and older lefties. Looking about, I realized that, even on the liberal Upper West Side, I often go days without seeing a man wearing that hot, balding-with-ponytail look. Of the younger part of the audience, the lion's share were foreign—Europeans and some South Asians.

The introduction included a list of upcoming antiwar events, the highlight of which was a march on the Pentagon. I wanted to ask if they are going to levitate it. For those who want to relive their youth, there are many upcoming music and protest gatherings.

Sgrena, a petite, upper-class ash blond, whose skin is weather-beaten and un-enhanced by cosmetics, speaks English well enough but in a strikingly whiny tone. Still, she managed to get out a fairly straightforward version of her tale. She was in Iraq to cover the American atrocities, especially in Falluja, a city she views as a symbol of "resistance against the occupation." She believes that the embed system that has allowed

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journalists unprecedented access to the troops and live military action—successful and otherwise—guarantees that journalists empathize with the armed forces. She likes to think of herself as an "embed with the victims." She wrote about it in that highly emotive, personal manner that is popular in European journalism showcasing the evils of the American occupiers.

Then one night Sgrena was captured. She was, she says, very frightened. The "insurgents who kidnapped [her] were not criminals or fundamentalists, although they did pray every day," she said. But "I really don't know who they were." She was willing to credit them with treating her well materially. She got enough food and medicine, and they told her they wouldn't kill her. But she didn't actually believe them. How could she?

Her book well describes the pain, fear, and tedium of powerlessness. She had no pen, paper, or reading material. And her captors forced her to make a video asking the Italian government to pay ransom. For this she was roundly criticized by other journalists, which was also painful. It was a terrible ordeal, by any standard.

Finally, one night, her captors blindfolded her, drove her for a time, and parked. After what seemed like an endless interlude, an Italian Secret Service agent, Nicola Calipari, called out, "I am a friend of your publisher and your husband." He came and sat beside her in the car and told her she was safe, as another agent took the wheel. As she told the audience, "He was really a normal man. I couldn't imagine that he was an intelligence officer."

As they drove to the airport, chatting to the prime minister of Italy on cell phones, there was a sudden light. The driver said, "They are attacking us," and Nicola covered her with his body. When the shooting stopped, Nicola was dying. The car had gone through a U.S. roadblock and been fired upon.

Who can doubt that this was a brutal experience? And it would have been rude to ask if she still thought it was brave to "embed with the victims" in a war zone and in a culture where noncombatant journalists are not given a pass, where her reporting cost the life of a government agent, and put the government of Italy in a position where it had little choice but to pay ransom to terrorists.

Anyway, that's how I see it. But neither she nor her supporters share that view. They blame—yes—the U.S. government. After investigating the incident, the U.S. forces reported that the car had been speeding, and sped up further at the roadblock. She says that didn't happen. Sgrena believes that the grunts at the roadblock knew precisely who was in the car and fired because they wanted her dead.

AP Photo / Myriam Vogel

Italian journalist Giuliana Sgrena, with the German edition of her book

Have you ever wondered where all of those very earnest, comprehensive left-wing conspiracy theories come from? The ones that posit the worst conceivable motives of the U.S. government in even the most trivial sequence of events? Book tours like this are where. An alternative version of events is being established and rehearsed. And it will go out, repeatedly, as it has for the past two years, over alternative radio stations, and in alternative newspapers.

But on this one night, unless I miss my guess, the audience didn't seem to be buying. One middle-aged man, dressed like an academic,

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asked, "It seems that you are claiming that the U.S. military behaved either with complicity or incompetence. Which is it, do you think?"

There was the nut of it. Sgrena sidled into the answer. "Well," she whined hesitantly, "I don't think it was incompetence. They were high-ranking soldiers." Yes, they were high-ranking members of a New York National Guard company doing thankless night patrol on a rainy airport road in Iraq. Even the stern, far-left interlocutoress, Amy Goodman, felt compelled to ask what motive they might have had.

To summarize the answer: The United States doesn't like negotiations with terrorists. Italy had paid ransom. They must be taught a lesson. (By the way, this rationale cleverly answers the critical question of why the Italian government had not notified its American allies that they were springing their national and heading to the airport that night—behavior that was both incompetent and costly.) As for evidence, Sgrena claimed as fact that 58 bullets w ere fired and a later examination of the vehicle showed that 57 of them were aimed at the passenger seat, and only one at the engine. Which, she feels, "proves" they were trying to get her, and only the sacrifice of the brave Nicola Calipari saved her from the American death squad.

(It is worth noting that a U.S. investigation showed none of this. The Italian government did not accept the investigation report.)

Since we know all too well that "no negotiations with terrorists" has proved a pretty flexible rule for all recent U.S. administrations, it is ludicrous on its face as a reason for the U.S. military to execute a high-ranking intelligence officer of a staunch ally. Much as I respect our military, the case for error—incompetence if you must, or perhaps merely adherence to normal rules of engagement in a hot war—is open and shut.

Because, if 57 shots were, indeed, fired at a targeted passenger, and she is still alive—now that is incompetent indeed. ♦

Gunfight at D.C. Corral

A victory for the Second Amendment.

BY ERIN SHELEY

When Blackstone described the right to carry arms as part of the natural right of "self-preservation," he could not have envisioned the situation of a professional woman coming home late to an empty Washington, D.C., apartment. Yet in a city declared by its police chief to be in a state of "crime emergency" last summer, where being followed home from Metro stops is a not uncommon experience for female residents, where, according to FBI statistics, 3,577 burglaries were reported in 2005, and where even nonlethal Taser guns are a prohibited means of self-defense, Blackstone's description rings powerfully true.

It is not surprising, then, that the most recent shots in the jurisprudential struggle over the Second Amendment have been fired here in "gun-free" Washington. On March 9, a panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit decided *Parker* v. *District of Columbia*, in which the plaintiffs challenged three D.C. gun laws that together effectively prohibit private ownership of handguns in the nation's capital. The first disputed provision bars registration of handguns. The second forbids "carrying" a pistol, even inside one's home. The third requires that pistols be kept unloaded and disassembled, or bound by a trigger lock at all times. All prevent an individual from lawfully defending his or her home against an intruder. In an opinion by Senior Circuit Judge Laurence Silberman, over a dissent by Judge Karen Henderson, the panel struck down the provisions as violating the Second Amendment.

The text of that amendment sounds straightforward enough: "A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the People to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed." Yet courts and constitutional scholars have filled forests' worth of paper arguing over its meaning. "Collective rights" theorists claim the amendment protects only *states*' rights to maintain militias without federal interference. "Individual rights" theorists argue that the amendment protects a private citizen's right to use weapons for lawful purposes such as self-defense.

In sharp contrast to the bloated Supreme Court jurisprudence growing out of most other amendments, though, the High Court has been nearly silent on the proper interpretation of the Second. The Court's most thorough construction of the provision, in the 1939 case *United States* v. *Miller*, did not turn on whether the amendment applies to individual citizens, but on whether a short-barreled shotgun qualifies as a protected "arm."

In the absence of Supreme Court guidance, a majority of federal appellate courts have adopted the collective rights model. Most recently, in the 2002 *Silveira* case, the Ninth Circuit held that "bear arms" refers only to carrying weapons in military service and, thus, the Second Amendment protects only collective rights. Prior to the recent *Parker* decision, the only federal circuit adopting the individual rights approach was the Fifth Circuit in *United States* v. *Emerson* in 2001 (a case discussed by

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Nelson Lund in this magazine before the decision came down, "Taking the Second Amendment Seriously," July 24, 2000). State appellate courts are likewise divided: Courts in seven states have held for an individual rights interpretation (Colorado, Kentucky, Louisiana, Montana, Tennessee, Washington, and West Virginia), while ten others have adopted the collective rights theory (Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Texas, Utah, and Illinois).

And the debate has extended beyond the bench. In a 2001 memorandum opinion from Attorney General John Ashcroft, the Department of Justice officially adopted the individual rights understanding. Under prior administrations, the department has gone both ways. Professor Laurence Tribe's most recent constitutional law treatise supports the individual rights view, as do, as the *Parker* court notes, "the great legal treatises of the nineteenth century." Perhaps the most eloquent proponent of the individual rights view was Ninth Circuit Judge Alex Kozinski, in dissent from his court's denial of rehearing in *Silveira*:

> Judges know very well how to read the Constitution broadly when they are sympathetic to the right being asserted. . . . When a particular right comports especially well with our notions of good social policy, we build magnificent legal edifices on elliptical constitutional phrases—or even the white spaces between lines of constitutional text. But . . . when we're none too keen on a particular constitutional guarantee, we can be equally ingenious in burying language that is incontrovertibly there.

In *Parker*, the D.C. panel held that the language of the Second Amendment plainly protects an individual right. First, as the court notes, "the most important word is the one the drafters chose to describe the holders of the right—'the People.'" No one would, for example, seriously argue that the First Amendment's protection of free speech (or the Fourth Amendment's prohibition of unreasonable searches and seizures) does not protect "the People," *as individuals*, against government encroachments. And the Constitution assumes that, like the right to free speech, the right to bear arms existed *before* the formation of government; the amendment does not grant the right, but merely states that it is not to be infringed. This right flowed, during the constitutional project of young America, from the right to "have Arms" in England's 1689 Bill of Rights, which described that right as belonging to "Subjects."

The court points out the word "bear," as defined in dictionaries and used in the 1787 Pennsylvania ratifying convention, encompasses a wide range of meanings, most prominently "to carry," and is not restricted to the specific military meaning asserted by the District of Columbia to support its collective rights view. The court also finds that "'keep' is a straightforward term that implies ownership or possession of a functioning weapon by an individual for private use."

Finally, the court concludes that the Second Amendment's endorsement of a well-armed militia "is narrower than the guarantee of an individual right to keep and bear arms" and that "the amendment does not protect 'the right of militiamen to keep and bear arms,' but rather 'the right of the people.'" As the court observes, "if the competent drafters of the Second Amendment had meant the right to be limited to the protection of state militias, it is hard to imagine that they would have chosen the language they did."

Beyond its importance for D.C. citizens, *Parker* may encourage the Supreme Court, at last, to articulate a unified Second Amendment jurisprudence after two centuries of uncertainty. Should the matter reach the High Court, the split between circuits makes it more likely the Court would agree to hear the case. Given the current makeup of the Court, many in the individual rights camp certainly hope it will.

In his book *A Matter of Interpretation*, Justice Antonin Scalia seems to support the individual rights model, and Justice Clarence Thomas has observed, in a concurring opinion, "a growing body of scholarly commentary indicates that the 'right to keep and bear arms' is, as the amendment's text suggests, a personal right." During his Senate confirmation hearing, however, Chief Justice John Roberts, though he acknowledged the "open issue" of the Second Amendment, declined to express an opinion because of the conflict between circuits and his belief that the Supreme Court would eventually decide the matter. As a Third Circuit judge, Justice Samuel Alito, dissenting in the 1996 *Rybar* case, argued that the federal law criminalizing machine gun possession was unconstitutional, though he cited the Commerce Clause, not the Second Amendment. The positions of the other justices also remain unclear.

Regardless, the media attention on a Second Amendment Supreme Court case could make gun laws a centerpiece in the upcoming presidential election, especially if a vacancy on the Court occurs during the campaign. Contenders may have to do more this cycle than don fatigues and go duck hunting to placate voters who care about their right to self-defense.

And, as a look at the circumstances of the *Parker* plaintiffs shows, that group of voters is more diverse than commonly thought. Plaintiff Shelly Parker is a resident of a high-crime D.C. neighborhood who has been threatened by drug dealers for "trying to make her neighborhood a better place to live." Plaintiff Dick Anthony Heller is a police officer, also living in a dangerous neighborhood and, thus, a target for retributive violence when off duty and unarmed. Plaintiff Tom G. Palmer is a gay man who was once assaulted for his sexual orientation and able to ward off his attackers with a handgun. In their variety, these plaintiffs exemplify why the right to self-defense is, as the Framers recognized through the plain language of the Second Amendment, a foundation upon which the other rights we enjoy rest. ♦

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Se Habla Lawsuit?

Another reason to dislike the Justice Department.

BY EDWARD BLUM

"A City of Homes . . . A City for Business . . . A City Rich with History and Multi-cultural Diversity"—so reads the motto of Springfield, Massachusetts (pop. 150,000), halfway between New York and Boston. With an ethnic mix of blacks, whites, Hispanics, and others reflected in its local government, Springfield, like most of New England today, supports liberal Democrats at the polls. In the 2006 election, for instance, nearly 70 percent of Springfield voters backed Deval Patrick, the African-American Democratic nominee for governor.

So it must have come as a shock to city officials when the U.S. Department of Justice slammed Springfield with a lawsuit claiming, among other transgressions, "rude treatment" of Spanish-speaking voters in 2005. According to the complaint filed in federal court, some "Spanish-speaking voters have left the polls without casting a ballot due to the absence of bilingual assistance." The Justice Department asked the court to require the city to beef up its assistance, notably by hiring more Spanish-speaking poll workers and developing a plan to ensure that Hispanics "understand, learn of, and participate in all phases of the electoral process."

Springfield, like hundreds of other towns and counties around the country, is subject to Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act because, among many other complex criteria, more than 5 percent of the city's population speaks a particular foreign language. The law requires covered jurisdictions to translate all printed election materials into that language and provide foreign-language assistance at the polls. In its six years in office, the Bush administration has filed 19 lawsuits charging noncompliance with Section 203, more than were filed in all the years from 1978 to 2000 combined.

Setting aside for a moment the interesting point that even foreign-born voters should be able to understand their ballots since the ability to speak English is a condition for gaining American citizenship, it is fair to ask how much trouble non-English-speaking voters actually encounter at the polls. If the data from Springfield are any indication, the answer is very little. Not a single Spanish-speaking voter in Springfield had complained in the election that prompted the Justice Department to sue.

While this may seem puzzling at first, it turns out that complaints on the ground are not what trigger an enforcement action. Instead, Justice bureaucrats regularly comb through voter registration rolls in covered jurisdictions, counting Spanish, say, or Chinese or Vietnamese surnames; then they count the number of foreign language-speaking poll workers; and if the ratios don't comport with their ideal percentages, they sue. No phone calls, no warning letters, no inquiries about extenuating circumstances. They go straight to court.

Springfield entered into a consent decree with the Justice Department that required the town to triple the number of bilingual poll workers it hires and to allow federal observers to monitor the next few elections. The government sent in a small army of monitors to observe the first election after this agreement, a primary in September 2006. Springfield's city attorney, Ed Pikula, told the Associated Press, "It's unfair to saddle the city with that type of intrusion." And it cost the American taxpayer tens of thousands of dollars.

How did the government run up such an exorbitant tab? The Department of Justice sent four employees from Washington to Springfield at a cost of $3,488 for travel, room, and board. The Office of Personnel Management sent in 45 employees from around the country, some from the Northeast, but many from as far away as California and Florida, according to sources who were in Springfield during the election. Assuming similar costs for both agencies, the monitoring operation cost at least $40,000.

And how helpful to Springfield's Spanish-speaking voters was this exercise? According to the observation reports filed by these 45 people, there were 92 instances of bilingual "voter assistance." That is, 92 voters out of more than 16,000 *said something* to a poll worker in a language other than English. They may have asked a question about the ballot, or made a comment on the weather; regardless, the interaction was recorded as a "person receiving language assistance." This monitoring didn't come cheap at $435 per voter. If Washington sends the same number of observers for the general election, where turnout is higher, the monitoring cost will still run more than $100 per voter assisted.

Boston is another covered city, and it held a primary the same day as Springfield. The Department of Justice sent 6 employees from its Civil Rights Division to Boston at a cost of $6,000, and the Office of Personnel Management sent 49 observers. Out of 87,000 voters in Boston that day, 210 received "language assistance." The taxpayers' tab was less than Springfield's bill, but still more than $250 a voter.

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Voting is the vital mechanism of democracy, and the government should make every effort to ensure that elections are accessible and fair. But there are better ways of going about it than this. Most election officials are mindful of the law and want to make voting accessible to everyone. But enforcement along these lines is unnecessary and, frankly, foolish. The Justice Department has embraced the legal tactics of a sue-happy plaintiff's lawyer: dig through a jurisdiction's election data looking for an improperly low number of bilingual poll workers, file a lawsuit, then muscle the local government into a consent decree and settlement—another scalp to add to the pile.

(Indeed, there is speculation that the real impetus for the sudden increase in Section 203 enforcement was a series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions in voting rights cases culminating in 2003, which had the effect of significantly reducing the workload of the career lawyers in the voting section at the Justice Department. For what it's worth, 17 of the 19 enforcement actions brought by the Bush administration have been filed since those decisions came down.)

Congress was skeptical of renewing the foreign language ballot provisions of the Voting Rights Act last summer. Led by Rep. Steve King, an Iowa Republican, 181 GOP members of the House (and 4 Democrats) voted to eliminate Section 203. Unfortunately, the effort failed, and the provision was renewed for 25 years. Too bad members of Congress weren't aware of the deplorable manner in which Section 203 was being enforced when they made this decision. Now the only way good sense can prevail in the matter of foreign language ballots is for the Justice Department of its own accord to stop suing jurisdictions unnecessarily and start reasonably enforcing the law.

Speaking of which, just whose job is it anyway to enforce the requirement that new citizens be able to speak English? ♦

Reaping the Whirlwind

Mississippi's insurance problem is everybody's.

BY ELI LEHRER

More than 18 months after Hurricane Katrina devastated the Gulf Coast, the state of Mississippi finds itself in a legal battle over homeowners' insurance that may take longer to clean up than the hurricane debris. Thousands of Mississippians have seen their houses reduced to concrete slabs and want somebody to pay. Both government-subsidized and private insurance programs have failed to adequately fund rebuilding. Legislative proposals and lawsuits have poured out, and the state Democratic party has begun running television commercials blaming Republican governor Haley Barbour for the scores of Mississippians "still living in trailers."

In this uncertain environment, the state's largest insurer, State Farm, has stopped issuing new homeowners' policies, and its second largest, Allstate, has cut back. All others have stopped writing new wind insurance policies along the Gulf Coast. Because they expose a key inconsistency in America's mixed private-government insurance system for coastal areas, these events herald a stark choice for the whole country: Either homeowners will take responsibility for their own homes or taxpayers will become the nation's major source of homeowners' insurance.

Mississippi's Democratic attorney general, Jim Hood, a *bête noire* to much of the insurance industry, told me that he sees a simple bottom line: "The current system is a giant conflict of interest. It can't last. In the long term, I believe that the market should be able to solve the problem and that we should do away with the federal flood [insurance] program altogether."

Throughout the country, conventional homeowners' policies don't cover flooding. Along the Gulf Coast, private coverage for wind damage often proves unaffordable. In addition to private homeowners' policies, most people in hurricane zones can therefore avail themselves of both federally-backed flood insurance and state-sponsored wind insurance.

On paper, this public-private system looks sensible; subsidized wind and flood insurance both arose in situations of clear need. When the state created the Mississippi Windstorm Underwriting Association (popularly, the "wind pool") in 1987, some Gulf Coast homeowners paid as much for wind insurance as for mortgages. Before Congress created the National Flood Insurance Program in 1969, likewise, virtually no conventional private insurance companies wrote flood policies, because only people with severe flood risks would have purchased them. Today, to ensure the federal program spreads risks broadly, most flood-plain homeowners with mortgages face a mandate to purchase flood insurance. In theory, both the federal flood program and state wind program must charge premiums high enough to support themselves without taxpayer infusions.

It doesn't work that way in practice. Both the federal flood insurance program and the Mississippi wind pool regularly raid their respective treasuries. Stabilizing Mississippi's wind pool in the wake of Katrina

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required Gov. Barbour to divert $50 million in federal grants while the state legislature debated a bill to provide even more money and new rules. The wind pool itself proposed a 400 percent hike in homeowners' premiums. The federal flood insurance program faces similar problems: Although almost everyone who has bought a flood-prone home in the last 30 years has had to purchase flood insurance at some point, not everyone kept their policies current. Coastal Mississippi had the lowest participation rate on the Gulf. The area had avoided flooding in previous storms, and many erroneously believed that their homeowners' policies would cover flood damage.

But Katrina wreaked havoc throughout the state. Even 18 months after the storm, pockets of devastation remain. "Within a quarter mile of the coast, it's still utter desolation," says Billy Hewes, a Mississippi Republican state senator and insurance agent who represents hard-hit Harrison County.

Angry homeowners have turned to the courts after insurance companies denied claims. One lawsuit from two Biloxi homeowners had particularly sweeping consequences: In January, federal judge L.T. Senter Jr. ordered State Farm to pay a $223,292 claim and $2.5 million in punitive damages to Norman and Genevieve Broussard. The case and a cascade of similar claims contributed to State Farm's decision to stop writing new policies in Mississippi.

The Broussards' situation was typical of homeowners' complaints. Faced with an entirely destroyed house, the Broussards filed a claim. State Farm said that flooding—explicitly excluded from its policies—had caused the damage and provided expert testimony in court to back this up. The Broussards claimed their home collapsed because of wind damage that State Farm should have covered. The problem is, there's almost no way to know what caused the damage. Senter based his ruling on the common law principle that courts should resolve insurance-contract ambiguities in favor of the insured. A proposed class action settlement that soon followed seems likely to get both federal and state approval: Under it State Farm and other insurers will likely have to pay billions in claims that they never expected to.

In the long term, this situation is untenable. Faced with the risk of similar payouts, State Farm and other large insurers will have little choice but to continue their pullback. Attorney General Hood has proposed following the lead of Florida, New Jersey, and a handful of other states and forcing State Farm to sell homeowners' policies if it sells any other type of policy in the state. Even he, however, calls this a "temporary, short-term fix to stabilize the situation." Barbour has pooh-poohed the idea, and it seems unlikely to move forward.

Michael Ramirez

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Legislation to bail out Mississippi's wind pool may offer a fix only until the next major storm. "Mississippi is the freckle on the end of the tail of the dog," says Larry Cox, director of the University of Mississippi's insurance program. "We just aren't big enough to support [a wind-insurance program]. In the long term, it needs to be multistate." Cox argues that an all-South wind insurance pool might work, and Mississippi insurance commissioner George Dale has expressed interest in the idea. Tom Quaka, the president of Mississippi-only Brierfield Insurance, fears that even an improved Mississippi wind pool "will need some more changes after the next big storm." Even a multistate wind pool might eventually need a bailout.

Thus, an all-government solution looms. Rep. Gene Taylor, a Democratic congressman from Mississippi, has started pushing a bill to create federal "multi-peril" insurance, adding wind storms to the federal flood program. For all intents and purposes, this would displace a massive part of the private homeowners' insurance market everywhere. Although it has little chance of moving forward at the moment, the bill has attracted an ideologically mixed set of sponsors including extreme liberal Maxine Waters of California and Republican rising star Bobby Jindal of Louisiana.

A Congressional Research Service report has sharp criticism of Taylor's proposal. In particular, CRS insurance analyst Rawle King observes that a new federal insurance program would displace private wind insurance even in places where such coverage "is cheap and plentiful" and would impose an enormous unfunded mandate on taxpayers. King points out that Congress would be tempted to keep yearly premiums low and then ramp up "emergency" spending to bail out the program after disasters.

But proponents of an increased federal role raise a valid point: In true catastrophes like Hurricane Katrina, it's nearly impossible to determine exactly what caused damage. In areas with small numbers of insurers, supposedly "independent" adjusters do most of their work for a single company, creating a potential conflict of interest. The very existence of government flood and wind pools creates a moral hazard: Under the current system, it's possible for insurance companies to collect premiums for "safer" coverage while sticking taxpayers with the serious bills.

The alternatives to an ever-larger government role involve difficult choices. Over 20 percent of the properties currently in the federal flood insurance program could not be built today with ordinary financing and insurance. At least in Mississippi, the same goes for many properties in the state wind insurance pool. A rational market would likely demand unaffordable yearly premiums for these "nonconforming" properties. Unless lenders and local governments do more to encourage flood insurance purchase, furthermore, premiums would likely rise sharply in a private market even for safer but still flood- and wind-prone properties.

Hazard mitigation efforts—ranging from razing houses to purchasing flood prone land and transforming it to parks—offer some hope of saving nonconforming properties. Letting insurance companies apply for federal charters like those offered to banks could also lead to a more healthy spreading of risk, more regulatory competition, and, thus, lower long-term rates for "conforming" but still flood-prone properties.

Avoiding a government takeover of homeowners' insurance, however, means that some people will have to move, sell for less than expected, or assume massive personal risks. In the end, the situation in Mississippi demonstrates a simple fact: The United States faces a logic that leads either to all private or all public property insurance. Anything in between is becoming untenable. ♦

"General Petraeus has written an open letter to the members of Multinational Forces Iraq, and there's a lot to like in this letter—liberal rules of engagement, a more aggressive strategy both for fighting insurgents and helping civilians rebuild. And the idea that the troops 'can't commute to the fight in counterinsurgency operations' strikes me as a rebuke to the Democrats' call for 'strategic redeployment.'"

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And the Band Plays On . . .

The music of New Orleans is still alive, but will the city ever recover?

By Matt Labash

New Orleans

To eat New Orleans raw, if you're into that sort of thing, it helps to be at the Maple Leaf Bar on Tuesdays around midnight. The Maple Leaf is a legendary watering-hole-in-the-wall. Its décor is of the scuffed-pool-table/Abita-beer-sign variety. It has worn plank floors and chipped crimson walls and pressed-tin ceilings through which peek gaslight pipes from the days before the place went electric. Its music hall is about the length and width of three living rooms. It is here that almost every Tuesday night, on a rickety postage stamp of a stage, the best live band in America, the Rebirth Brass Band, makes its stand.

The band's leader and founder, Tuba Phil Frazier, describes their sound as not jazz, not funk, but "junk." But this "junk" is like mainlining the very soul of New Orleans—the sousafunky sounds of tuba and bass drum-driven percussion propelling call-to-war horns. It is the soundtrack of its streets and jazz funerals and "second-line" parades in which brass bands move through the city's black neighborhoods on Sunday afternoons during parade season. In keeping with the town's never-ending-party ethos—the reason New Orleans always seems three beers ahead of wherever you're from—the "season" lasts two-thirds of the year.

During it, brass bands take to the streets at the behest of the city's scores of social aid and pleasure clubs, collecting second-line dancers behind them as a coat collects lint. A tradition that predates jazz itself, it's serious business—like church without religion. Men will skip football for second lines, and women will buy outfits for them. Unlike the rest of America, accustomed to living in flat-screened isolation chambers, New Orleans people—or what's left of them after Katrina—like to go out into the street to see and be seen.

Though it is internationally renowned, now playing jazz festivals throughout the world, Rebirth still owns these streets. It developed its sound playing them ever since Frazier cofounded the band in 1983 with Kermit Ruffins (now solo). As high school kids in the Treme neighborhood, from where so many of the city's musicians come, they played the French Quarter for tips, using them to buy Popeyes chicken and beer for themselves, and lunchmeat for Frazier's poor family. "If there was any money left over, our momma said buy some Kool-Aid—so you know we were ghetto," says Frazier's sister, Nicole James, an actress who works the door of her brother's show, while pushing the T-shirts of her rapper/tax-accountant husband. (In these uncertain times, it pays to have a fallback gig.)

The band, as currently constituted, is nine players strong. They are mostly thirtysomething and all African-American locals who came up in housing projects and some of the city's rougher neighborhoods, like the 9th Ward and the Treme. They tend to stay a long time. Even Rebirth's rookies have six years under their belts, and some have been playing with the band since they were teenagers.

Like an army ready to advance, they take their places onstage in two straight lines. The back line is the foundation, as Phil calls it, that pushes the front. There is no set list or sheet music. Roughly half their songs are originals, but none are written down. Tuba Phil calls all the tunes by blowing the opening licks, from New Orleans traditionals to retooled R&B numbers by the likes of Marvin Gaye and Curtis Mayfield. If other players can't catch what he's doing from one of the 500 or so songs in their repertoire, they're better off finding another band.

Joining Phil and his sonic-boom of a sousaphone is Derrick "Big Sexy" Tabb, who plays with a viciousness that suggests he is skinning a cat, rather than hitting a snare drum. Mötley Crüe's Tommy Lee called him "one

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of the baddest drummers I've ever seen." Next to Big Sexy, strapped up to a parade bass drum, is Keith "Bass Drum Shorty" Frazier, Phil's younger brother and the only other original member of the band. Around town, he is known for a peculiar innovation. He plays his high-hat cymbal not with a coat-hanger, as was the tradition before he changed it, but with a flathead screwdriver, since he likes the way it sounds: "like the swoop-splash of a rock hitting a lake."

Slathering all that bass in brass is the front line, who, standing six across in their wife-beater tank-tees, sports jerseys, and low-hanging jeans, look less like a horn section than like a hit squad of brass assassins. Each of them is a tight enough pocket player that he could hold the groove in the JB Horns (the Rebirth's heroes). But as a marksman, each is also dangerous enough to score a solo head-shot from a hundred yards away.

On saxophones are Byron "Flea" Bernard, a social worker who also plays with his church band and who dearly wishes Rebirth would cut a gospel album, and Vincent Broussard, who looks like he should play with the Wailers with his back-length dreadlocks. On trombone is Lil' Herb Stevens, who is not lil' at all, and who sports Bible-themed tattoos all over his arms, patting Jesus on His head and apologizing if anyone says anything sacrilegious. Joining him is Stafford "Freaky Pete" Agee, so named for calling the ladies onstage and "freaking" them, though he is still a man of high principle: He refuses to play anything that's not grease-bucket funky.

Leading the charge are the band's slash-and-burn trumpet players. There's sparkplug dynamo Derrick "Khabuki" Shezbie, whose cheeks turn into Dizzy Gillespie balloons when he blows (he often brackets one with his free fingers to get a tighter sound). A member of another brass band enviously tells me, "Khabuki could carry that band, and two others at the same time." Rounding the lineup out is Glen "The General" Andrews, who likes to head for the high registers like a runaway sherpa who's caught sight of the summit.

He is called "The General" because he, along with his cousin Big Sexy, likes to make sure everyone hits his parts (Khabuki, too, is a distant cousin). You'd never know that Andrews is self-taught and doesn't even read music. "Wynton Marsalis might say, 'What the hell are you doin'!'" he jokes. But as The General tells me with a gold-toothed grin, "I can go where he plays, but he can't come on our stage where we play. I play something I made up from my heart, y'know." It puts me in mind of something Louis Armstrong said of snooty Creole musicians when he and Kid Ory blew them off the street during a jazz funeral: "Any learned musician can read music, but they all can't swing."

And swing the Rebirth does, especially live. Not to take anything away from their 13 fine recordings, but the difference between hearing them live and on disc is the difference between making love to a beautiful woman and having the experience described to you. Still, I haven't come to New Orleans to sign on as their roadie. I'm here on official business, to take a snapshot of their city a year and a half after Katrina nearly totaled it.

To that end, I bring to the Maple Leaf show one of my old guides to New Orleans, the pseudonymous Kingfish, of whom I've written in these pages twice before. When I first met him, as the waters were still rolling in after Katrina, New Orleans felt like a live adaptation of the Book of Revelation. People were dying in the streets, the desperate became more so, and the lawless were taking over. A good native son whose family goes back to the city's beginnings, Kingfish was one of the last men standing in his swank Uptown neighborhood. He let our visiting crew of journalists clean out his refrigerator and bathe in his pool, since the hotels had long since evacuated.

Before the gig, I stop by his house to collect him. His kids are snug in their beds, instead of in exile in Florida. And there is nobody sleeping on the couch with a shotgun, as was his looter-protection practice back during the flood. There is one remnant of those days, however. In his living room is a trophy case featuring a pair of beat-up Adidas sneakers. In between running humanitarian rescue missions during the storm, Kingfish lost patience with the looters. When he saw one coming out of a linen store with a swag bag—hardly a necessity unless the thief had to have cool fabrics for summer—Kingfish bore down on him with his shotgun. "Scared him clean out of his shoes," he says. "I just couldn't take it anymore."

As he fixes us some pregame Old Fashioneds, Mrs. Kingfish eyes his pressed khakis and Casual-Friday chambray shirt disapprovingly. "You're going to the Maple Leaf," she says, "Don't you have a black T-shirt or something?" He shrugs his shoulders, in a what-do-you-want-from-me fashion. "I probably have a buttoned-down T-shirt somewhere," he says. While Kingfish plays at being the Uptown swell, like many whites in New Orleans who've benefited from three centuries of cultural cross-fertilization, he has more soul than he likes to let on.

We get to the bar before the Rebirth does, and Kingfish eyes the decrepitude approvingly. "You can't reproduce this," he says. "When you go to Joe's Crab Shack, this is what they try to do." The Meters play on the juke, while the bar is the kind of place where you can have enlightened debates as to who was the better piano player, Professor Longhair or James Booker (the late Booker usually wins, since he used to hold down Rebirth's Tuesday night gig). At the end of the bar is a photo of Everette Maddox, who was the Maple Leaf's "poet laureate," at least until he

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Reuters / Corbis / Lee Celano

Khabuki Shezbie of the Rebirth Brass Band on trumpet during the Zulu Mardi Gras parade, February 20, 2007

drank himself to death. Maple Leaf owner Hank Staples says that he's buried out back on the patio. At least half of him is. Seems there was a dispute among his friends, and the rest of his ashes were scattered in the Mississippi River. He died as he lived, and his tombstone testifies: "He was a mess."

It could be New Orleans's epitaph, and some would have it that way. But not tonight. Tonight the band takes the stage an hour and a half late (in the Big Easy, start times are mere suggestions). But the Rebirth makes up for it. The Frazier brothers lay down a thoracic cavity-thumping bass groove, and the rest of the band plays like their horns have caught fire and need blowing out. Empty beer bottles rattle on the speakers, while the band sings and spits and croaks out in frogman gurgles its burning-down-the-house anthem, "Rebirth Got Fire! Rebirth Got Fire!" Both black and white and rich and poor and middle-aged and young bob violently like several hundred buoys on a gathering wave.

Talent buyer Stu Schayot of the Howlin' Wolf club sees a lot of great bands, but tells me there's none like Rebirth: "When those guys play, there's a feeling that there's no other spot on this planet where this moment is happening. And if you're from New Orleans, it's like you own it. It's such a New Orleans thing they've created. My philosophy is: If everybody saw Rebirth once a week, there'd be no crime in this city. You go to a show, and every walk is there. You could be standing next to a lawyer, and a guy from the projects. No class, no race. All energy. Just people in unison, having a good time."

Close to me, I watch a freakishly nimble second-line dancer named Ron "The Busdriver" Horn, so monikered because he drives a bus. He moves as though his joints are made of Slinkys. He is black, but he wants me to meet Chocolate Swerve, his white sidekick and understudy. Swerve recently broke his ankle when the crowd got him over-pumped as he was dancing onstage during a Rebirth show at Tipitina's. ("In cowboy boots," Horn says with some embarrassment. "I laughed all the way to the hospital.")

Still, boasts Horn, "ain't nobody can deal with him," as Swerve replicates his moves. "We're brothers from another mother." Horn met Swerve after the former's house got washed out in the 9th Ward. Swerve was a roofer from out of town—one of the rare ones who didn't try to cheat him. They became thick as thieves, and,

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well, now look, says Horn, like the beaming parent of an accomplished child.

I ask Horn if this stuff matters, in the grand scheme of the greater disaster that has become his city. He looks at me as if someone had jumped me with a stupid stick. "It's all that matters." After the storm, he says, he left "a wonderful lady" back in Atlanta "who I dealt with for 11 years" because he had to get back. "This," he says, pointing to the Rebirth, "is what makes the culture keep living. I came back for my kids and the culture." Now 41 years old, he used to play trumpet in the same junior high band as Tuba Phil, and his son now plays trumpet in one of the best marching bands in New Orleans. "She's got the house now," he said, speaking of his woman. "But I came back for my culture. I told her if you ever need me, I'm there. But we're fighting here. Ain't gonna give up. I got to help rebuild."

I grab the Kingfish to introduce him, but the second he catches The Busdriver's eye, he exclaims, "Hey baby!" and they embrace. Years ago, Horn used to work for Kingfish. "This is New Orleans," Kingfish explains. "We all know each other." Kingfish doesn't tarry for long, however, as a pretty black girl innocently and wordlessly grabs his hand while the Rebirth plays "Feel Like Funkin' It Up." He spins her around the dance floor, or at least the two feet of it that are available to him. He smiles an isn't-this-place-great smile.

"Why do you think I put up with all the bulls—t?" Kingfish says.

There are plenty who said New Orleans wouldn't come back after the storm. But it's back, all right—back as the murder and mayhem capital of the United States. According to one Tulane demographer, in 2006, there were 96 murders per 100,000 people—68 percent more than in 2004. And 2007 is off to an auspicious start with 37 murders as of mid-March. It's an impressive effort from the bad guys of New Orleans, who are putting up big numbers even though there are fewer people around to kill. The population has dwindled to 191,000 from its pre-storm 467,000. With New Orleans's notoriously overstretched and feckless police force and DA, about two-thirds of the homicides are going unsolved. So many criminals have been released without charge that the term "misdemeanor murder" has gained wide currency.

While city spinmeisters would have it that the murder rate entails black-on-black drug-related killings—which is largely true—they're by no means all that's going on. In just one recent week, a female filmmaker and the Hot 8 Brass Band's Dinerral Shavers (who frequently sat in with Rebirth) were both killed in front of their own children, causing an outraged citizens' march on City Hall.

On some days, the *Times-Picayune* reads like good crime fiction with a southern gothic twist. There were the star-crossed lovers who met the night Katrina hit, and who ended up cohabiting over a voodoo temple in the Quarter. They came to a bad end when he calmly strangled her, dismembered her, then jumped off the roof of the same hotel in which I'm staying, but not before leaving a suicide note that detailed his handiwork: Police found parts of her in a pot on the stove next to the chopped carrots and more in the oven on turkey-basting trays. "He may have in retrospect seemed a little troubled," said his landlord.

Then there was the bizarre murder allegedly committed by renowned radio talk show host Vincent Marinello, who police suspect shot his wife in the face twice, made it look like a robbery in a parking lot, then rode away on his bike. The tip-off was the to-do list found in his FEMA trailer, with checkmarks beside incriminating tasks like "mustache and beard" and a reminder to get rid of the weapon. He appears to have remembered everything except to throw away his list.

None of this, of course, even addresses the post-Katrina toll or the frustration New Orleanians feel with federal, state, and local officials. Even many of those who voted to reelect Mayor Ray Nagin have taken to calling him "the invisible mayor." And after George W. Bush rejected Louisiana's Baker Plan to help speed rebuilding, and failed to forgive the state the matching 10 percent it must pay for all federal disaster assistance as he did New York after 9/11, and neglected even to mention New Orleans in his State of the Union address, many New Orleanians were unclear during his recent visit, when Bush promised that they hadn't been forgotten, whether he was reminding them or himself.

At a Rebirth show at the Howlin' Wolf one night, I watch as trombonist Stafford Agee takes the mike and improvises a lament in which he name-checks everyone from FEMA to the mayor to the president, with the sing-a-long refrain, "F— 'em all, f— 'em all, f— 'em all." The crowd joins in lustily. It doesn't feel like disaffected youth spoiling for a fight, either. It's not angry, so much as weary: the song of a city that's given immeasurable joy to the rest of the country with its music and architecture and food, but that feels like it's getting erased.

The Katrina Index, put out jointly by the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center and the Brookings Institution, and which might as well be called the Misery Index, tells the story in numbers. Less than 1 percent of those who've applied for assistance through the state's Road Home Program have received their home-repair grants. Public transportation has hardly improved in a

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year, with the city still at 17 percent of its buses. Though Orleans Parish schools were a disaster before the storm, with educational standards reportedly below those of Zimbabwe and Kenya, 56 percent of schools remain closed, and 69 percent of child-care centers do as well. The mass exodus of doctors might have to do with the fact that only 12 of Orleans Parish's 23 state-licensed hospitals are still in operation.

Then there are the things that statistics can't measure—the weirdness quotient. One afternoon, I take a spin around the city with another old friend, Joe Gendusa, a tour guide I met during Mardi Gras 2006. When he's not giving the Southern Comfort cocktail tour, he gives the Katrina Disaster tour for the Gray Line company three times a week. Gray Line is a bit of a disaster itself. Before the storm, it had 65 local full-time employees. Now it has four.

I took Gendusa's bus tour last year, but this year, as he drives me around in his car, I'm shocked at how little has changed in neighborhood after mostly abandoned neighborhood: Lakeview, Gentilly, the 9th Ward, St. Bernard Parish, New Orleans East. The only appreciable difference is that most of the debris has been cleared and many of the houses gutted. Now the place has the eeriness of one of those Rapture movies evangelical youth ministers show their charges to scare them into the Kingdom. Except nobody's been called up to Heaven. They're all in Baton Rouge or Houston or God-knows-where. Many old friends and neighbors still haven't found each other.

Tourists who only travel from the airport to the Quarter or the Garden District would never know anything's wrong. But the rest of the city? "It's a disaster, and will be for the rest of my lifetime," the 66-year-old Gendusa says. "You're talking about rebuilding an entire city." As we drive down a boulevard in Lakeview that once boasted large houses and oak canopies, but that is now desolate and destroyed, the lifelong New Orleanian, whose Italian immigrant grandfather helped start the Gendusa bakery empire that invented Po Boy bread, is gobsmacked. As he drives, here's a verbatim transcript of his reaction: "I don't recognize it. Oh my god! Look at this! Oh my god, look at this! Oh Jesus! Un-bel-leeeev-able!" Keep in mind, he sees this wreckage nearly every day, since he is paid, in essence, to feed off the cadaver.

And yet it never ceases to shock him. Nor does the behavior of some of the citizenry. "They're looting FEMA trailers!" he says. "What a bunch of scumbuckets!" He tells a particularly galling story. One woman who'd recently had her mother cremated was saving the ashes until she could have a proper burial at one of the city's storm-damaged cemeteries. "Her trailer was broken into, looted, everything was stolen out of boxes," Gendusa says. "Guess what they stole? Her mother! These stupid asses looted the mother! She's on television crying, saying you can have whatever you want, just bring my mother home. We won't ask any questions, just put her on the steps."

We look at each other for a beat, then both start laughing uncontrollably. Sometimes, there's nothing else to do. I've always loved New Orleans, because life comes at you here faster and stranger and more darkly beautiful than it does in other places. Sherwood Anderson called it "the most civilized spot in America"—a place where there is "time for a play of the imagination over the facts of life." These days, however, the imagination can't keep up.

A swarm of African killer bees has been found in St. Bernard Parish. The city has turned into "the super bowl of sex" for hookers, say the police, since there're so many out-of-town construction contractors to service. For a while, a transvestite gang of shoplifters was terrorizing stores on Magazine Street. Researchers have now determined that parts of the city are sinking more than one inch per year. And as if that's not a bad enough omen, there's now irrefutable proof that New Orleans is reverting to third-world conditions: Squalor-seekers Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt just got a place in the Quarter. "No matter what happens, we'll always have better restaurants than Namibia," cracks my friend Danny Abel, an attorney and Creole chef.

Then there's the tornado. It hits overnight while I'm in town. My phone rings in the morning, and it's the Kingfish. "C'mon, let's go see the wreckage," he says. "It'll be like old times." We drive around, surveying the damage where the twister came across the Mississippi and took a path from Uptown to Pontchartrain Park, damaging hundreds of homes and killing an old woman who was living in a FEMA trailer in her front yard, just days away from moving back into her repaired house.

Kingfish spins me around to one home in particular. "That's my friend's," he says, of a once-beautiful place that's now seen its second-story porch completely collapse, so that it looks like a fence was erected across the front door. Snapped telephone lines hang from branches like Mardi Gras beads after a parade. There are tons of downed trees and out-of-commission stoplights and missing street signs, though that was already true before the tornado hit. It does feel like a nostalgia tour. In fact, it's sometimes hard to tell the new destruction from the old destruction. "Look for rust," Kingfish instructs. This city is starting to feel doomed, I tell him. "Yeah, but how 'bout them Saints," he deadpans.

The Kingfish loves this city as much as anyone who's still here—and very few people are still here by accident.

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But he's hardly a romantic. Since I saw him last year, he's hedged his bets by selling off 70 percent of his real estate. "I was scared," he explains. On our drive, he points out all the big chains that aren't coming back, one of which, Ruth's Chris Steakhouse, was born in New Orleans. Pointing at Ruth's old house next to the shuttered restaurant, he says, "She lived there till the day she died. The corporate people she sold it to won't reopen it. I used to go there every Sunday night."

The fundamental problem, he opines, is that no real help is on the way, and simultaneously, the city is suffocating itself under paralyzed leadership that won't exclude any neighborhoods from redevelopment for fear of political blowback. They won't draw the net and stop pretending that they can support a footprint for 600,000 people, when only a third of that is left. "We had more people here at the beginning of the last century. Where else has that happened besides Chernobyl?" Kingfish asks. Consequently, services are spread thin. The city is being repopulated helter-skelter as the result of hundreds of thousands of individual insurance transactions and private choices.

And on the rare occasion that you are made whole by your insurance company and can rebuild, what if your neighbors aren't and can't? As he points out random blocks where one person is back and three houses on either side of him aren't, he says, "You have the jack-o'-lantern effect all over the city." This will contribute to blight, and already has, as even his construction materials are frequently stolen from building sites. If there's one thing Kingfish learned from the storm, he says, it's that "police don't protect neighborhoods, neighbors protect neighborhoods."

In the midst of this reality, everything is becoming more difficult. He gives me an example. He owns a building worth $1.1 million in New Orleans, and recently bought another for the same price in Maine. The difference, he says, is that insurance "in New Orleans is forty grand, in Maine, it's four. What does that mean? There's less profit, the property's worth less, and I have to charge more rent." If you don't feel sorry for the Kingfish and his investment problems, keep in mind that his reality trickles all the way down to the poor. On average in this city, a lousy one-bedroom apartment that used to rent for $531 per month before the storm now goes for $836.

He points to an abandoned business. "How are we gonna support all this blight? What's gonna happen to this? Somebody will buy it at some price at some point. But who are his customers?" The market always corrects, he says, ever the capitalist. "But it's going to be ugly, and people are going to get screwed." He says the city should have taken its federal aid, bought out all the poor, low-lying areas like the 9th Ward, made people whole, and given them the option to buy elsewhere, which would be less expensive than rebuilding it all. But now, individual residential renovations are already taking place, so a buy-out would cost infinitely more. As he says, "It's too late now."

On my ride with Gendusa, he told me his brother had moved across the lake out of Orleans Parish and now mocks him for refusing to do the same. "This is my home," he said. "I walk the streets of the Quarter, and I feel my grandparents and my parents. I can still see my daddy, walkin'. He loved New Orleans. I can never turn my back on it, even if it hurts to see it bleed." When friends visit, and remark that it is old and dirty, he tells them, "Go back to Disney World." He'd rather live in a diminished New Orleans than a thriving Orlando.

The Kingfish echoes the sentiment, as do nearly all the New Orleanians I speak to. He tells me still, even now, he's surrounded by beautiful architecture and brilliant music and world-class restaurants. "It's a unique place, great people," says Kingfish. "We have a very big soul here. But we have some fundamental flaws that are probably the opposite side of that coin. What makes us soulful also makes us sort of pitiful when it comes to fixing ourselves."

Yes, sometimes he gets jealous of friends who've fled to more stable places, where the headline of the day is that a new on-ramp will cut congestion, while the news here is "'Murders and Dismal Reality'—you just can't get away from it." "But you know what?" he adds defiantly. "I have friends leaving perfectly good cities to come back because they have survivor's guilt. They feel, 'I left my city, I gotta be in the game.' It's the biggest story to ever hit this town. So whaddya' gonna leave? Go live in Niceville?"

Two weeks after I've left, the Kingfish calls. He was coming home from the Louisiana Derby at the Fair Grounds racetrack, and in Mid-City he almost got caught in a drive-by murder. "We heard the pop-pop, and saw a bunch of thugs run past our car after the intersection was blocked. Had to back my car up to get out of there." He tells me to check the papers for the details. "Just make sure you get the right story. There were six shootings and three killings yesterday."

If New Orleans is not yet a Lost City, there is nobody in it who has not lost something. The Rebirth is no exception. During Katrina, over half the band members lost everything: their houses, their clothes, their instruments. Some won't even talk about it. Big Sexy Tabb, who had to hotwire a van to get his family and others to safety, is one of them. "If I could get hypnotized, I'd hope they'd say, 'You won't remember Katrina and all the s—t it caused.' But you live it every day, man. Every day."

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Even those from whom the floodwaters didn't take everything still have harrowing stories. Trumpet-player Khabuki Shezbie, for instance, was on the fourth floor of his apartment building, so his place didn't get flooded. But when the water started rising over the second floor, he decided to swim for it. He swam almost a mile, "with my horn on my back—had to replace all the valves," he says. He saw dead animals and people. Parents tried to float their kids on mattresses. Though a boat finally rescued him, somebody broke into his place afterwards and cleaned him out.

Sometimes, the loss manifests itself in the most innocent conversations. One day, I go see trombonist Stafford "Freaky Pete" Agee on his jobsite in a house that's being restored in the Lower 9th Ward. He is one of two Rebirth musicians who also work civilian jobs (Saxophonist Flea Bernard works in a welfare office, and says after the storm even six-figure lawyers were coming in for food stamps). Since Katrina hit, Agee has become an electrician, "just picked it up as I went." He wears a Lowe's apron, a white bandana around his head, and his high school marching band sweatshirt, though the school no longer exists. We talk music instead of destruction, but then I ask him if he names his trombones. Yes, he says, he names them after old girlfriends. "I have a couple horns named Sandy—she came around twice," he says.

I ask if he's ever named one after his ex-wife. "If I had, I would destroy it," he says bitterly. Now fishing, I joke that she hurt him. "Yeah, she did," he says. She cheated on him with a friend, which he discovered during a Battle of the Bands in Houston. Rebirth was there to play "a down-home New Orleans dance party" for evacuees. Now his marriage is busted, and his kids live in Alabama with relatives since the public-school waiting list is too long in New Orleans. So you see, he says, pointing to a socket that he's wiring, "I keep myself busy so I don't stay in my head."

The sadness is always there, he says. "But I take my frustrations out through my music. I use it to uplift myself. New Orleans right now is kind of a lost soul on stand-still. The soul of it isn't here, because a lot of people that bring that soul are no longer here. It's not like it used to be." So right now, says Agee, in a sentiment that one band member after another expresses, "it's like the city's on our shoulders. It's taken on more importance. Where else in the world can you go and find a brass band parading in the street every Sunday, or have them come over to play for your party? We carryin' it, keepin' the spirit. When they think the feeling is gone, it brings people back home."

Rebirth has always played the small shows, on the theory that all the money adds up, even if sometimes, according to trombonist Herb Stevens, it costs him more to drive to the gig than he makes, once the check is split nine ways. But now, the small gigs have taken on a missionary tint.

The Dirty Dozen Brass Band, which Tuba Phil idolizes and which revolutionized the sound of brass band music by incorporating contemporary R&B sounds (which the Rebirth has taken even further), has graduated from the street, sticking to the studio and big festivals. But Rebirth still lives off the land. They are truly the people's champion—not just a studio or festival band. They will play everything from baby showers to jazz funerals: As Shorty Frazier says, "When you're born and when you die and everything in between. 'Will you guys come play my bathroom while I take a bath?' Yeah, we'll do it. There's no gig too big or too small for Rebirth. It's good to stay plugged in."

In my ten days in New Orleans, I see them play everything from a second line in the Quarter, sponsored by a local sanitation company, to the Rock Bottom Lounge, where food consists of smoked pork chops you can order from a grill on the bed of a curbside pick-up truck. It's a place where there's no stage, and the band is partly obscured by a brick column. When I ask the bartender for a receipt, Tuba Phil mocks me: "Ain't no receipts here. Boy, you in a real ghetto bar."

I watch Rebirth play a Jefferson Parish Mardi Gras ball at a senior center, where the gig has to be delayed for two and a half hours because some of the seniors are still getting their hair done and are out buying king cakes. And I miss a gig (after being told the wrong restaurant) where Rebirth plays a Hermes krewe party in an upper room at Antoine's, while strippers go at each other. "It was nice," Freaky Pete says grinning. "Excruciating and exuberating—there's no word that can describe it."

New Orleans, of course, had a lot of problems before the storm. And these, too, touched Rebirth. When I go to interview Tuba Phil at his Gentilly home, I notice a framed portrait of a rapper—the kind of severe "Scarface" art you often see on MTV's *Cribs*. It's his stepson, Soulja Slim, who was gunned down in Phil's front yard four years ago. And that's not all. Drummer Derrick Tabb was shot twice at his half-brother's funeral ("Still got a bullet in my shoulder," he says). Rebirth's late snare drummer, Kenny "Eyes" Austin, died from a blood clot after getting hit in the head by a frying pan while breaking up a bar fight.

I take a tour of the Treme one day with the wickedly talented trombone player and belter Glen David Andrews. He fronts a band called the Lazy Six, and can break your heart doing guts-on-the-floor renditions of standards like "Precious Lord, Take My Hand." He isn't in Rebirth, but Tabb is his half-brother, and trumpet player Glen Andrews is his cousin.

Just over Rampart Street from the Quarter, he gives me

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a crash course in the old neighborhood. There's no need to hunt for the roses or the thorns, they're all right in front of you. Drug deals go down around us as if we were invisible. And yet, music legends walk the streets that run between shotgun shacks and old Creole cottages. You're just as likely to run into the Treme Brass Band's Uncle Benny Jones, or Henry Youngblood of "I Got a Big Fat Woman" fame, as you are some wino with cracked teeth muttering to himself in a drunken tongue.

That is changing, however. Big Sexy Tabb, Andrews's brother, tells me the "culture is dying." One mayor's office estimate said that only 10 percent of the city's musicians had returned full-time. In the Treme, the storm dispersed people (Andrews is now living in a broken-down FEMA trailer in Carrollton), and the institutional memory is drying up. There used to be so many musicians around that second lines were apt to break out at 3 A.M. Now, Andrews tells me, the Mexican laborers and white real-estate opportunists who are snatching up damaged property as "timeshares" complain about the noise. It's killing the music, says Tabb. "To learn, you got to hang around the older cats that were in brass bands. But now, you don't have that community."

When Tabb was a kid growing up in the Treme, "if you played a horn, you wanted to get out there and shine." But the old musicians would box your ears, and make you wait your turn as you learned. The Olympia Brass Band's Milton Batiste made sure "you didn't play no funk till you learned the traditionals—you ain't never bigger than this here music. You might bring something new, but it's all been played before." Those who think the music will stay, even as its incubator is unplugged, are sadly mistaken. The continuum's been interrupted. If Tabb were a doctor, he says, "I don't go tomorrow, put on some scrubs, and do an operation. There's a process, going to work on somebody's body. And here, the whole process has been f—ed up. You got to learn it. You got to feel it. You can't write what we do."

As Andrews walks me around the streets, he calls out to everyone he sees, "Where y'at, Uncle," and many of them actually are his uncles. (The Andrews clan makes the Marsalis family look feeble when it comes to breeding musicians, boasting everyone from James "Satchmo of the Ghetto" Andrews, to Revert "Peanut" Andrews of the Dirty Dozen, to Troy "Trombone Shorty" Andrews—the list goes on.)

Glen David Andrews shows me the Backstreet Cultural Museum—a monument to brass band musicians and Mardi Gras Indians housed in an old funeral home. He introduces me to many of the neighborhood characters, who like to hang out and drink on Dumaine and Robertson. On this corner, Andrews's 21-year-old cousin, Trombone Shorty, who's been praised by Wynton Marsalis and who has toured with Lenny Kravitz, later tells me some of the old men driven away by the storm still come back to hang out. So he goes to soak up their company while the soaking's good, "though most of them are drunk by the time I get there." Sometimes, one of the codgers will hum a lick in his ear, which he'll end up using. "Everybody around there, in some way, is in touch with music even though they might not play," he says. "I'm afraid that's the last bunch of them. I try to get as much as I can."

As Andrews walks me through an intersection near Louis Armstrong Park, he grows morose. "Bittersweet place," he says. It's where his cousin Glen "The General" Andrews's mom was murdered. "I was about 15," The General tells me one day when we're sitting in the Candlelight Bar in the Treme, one of the last neighborhood bars left standing. "I was right down the street, saw the ambulance, and didn't know it was for her."

One afternoon, after the Rebirth has played an outdoor gig by the Mississippi, The General introduces me to his wife, Ingrid, and lets her tell tales out of school. She relates lively stories about everything from the jazz-funeral groupies to how he's always lying to her to go hang in the Treme. He walks a few paces ahead, clutching the hand of their six-year-old daughter. He periodically turns around, rolling his eyes and smiling like he's been trapped in a bad sitcom. "I got to go on a six-month tour," he jokes. Ingrid says she actually doesn't like the Rebirth's music (she prefers Mary J. Blige), but their girl already has it bad. She's taking trombone lessons and probably never had a fair chance, since The General, when Ingrid was pregnant, used to put his horn up to her stomach and blow Louis Armstrong tunes to his unborn daughter.

Ingrid tells me The General's a beautiful person who'll do anything for anyone, that he cares for her and is never mean, but that he's struggled with heroin addiction. When Katrina hit, he was doing a six-month prison hitch on a drug charge. She knows, she says, that it's his mom's death that did it—"he suppressed it with drugs"—though only the shrink knows what he's really thinking, since he won't talk about the murder with her.

Back at the Candlelight, I ask The General if he plays better when he's using. "Sometimes," he answers, "sometimes not." But he knows he doesn't need it, since the rest of the band doesn't touch it. I ask him to describe the music that comes out of him. "Lotta pain, sometimes," he says, taking a hit off his straight Hennessey. "I don't talk to people too much, so that's how I express myself. Through my horn."

One day, I ask bandleader Tuba Phil how he can handle the one-two punch of the Katrina aftermath, plus all the murder and mayhem. After all, his stepson was

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Cheryl Gerber

Rebirth Brass Band marches on a recent Sunday in New Orleans, with Sudan Social Aid and Pleasure Club.

gunned down in his own front yard, also because he'd been involved in drugs. I love New Orleans, too. But isn't he ever tempted to chuck it all and move to Tulsa?

"Look," he says, "New Orleans people are strong.The ones who came back, I got to pat them on the back. 'Cause it was a s—hole [before Katrina], and it was a s—hole after. But they believe, like I believe, that we can turn this thing around. I feel I owe this city. I love the music. I love the people. Everybody's so free-hearted. Then you got 24-hour drinkin'," he says, belly-laughing. "If I wasn't living in New Orleans, I probably wouldn't be doin' what I'm doin' now. A tuba player! Makin' a living playing tuba! I'm 41 years old, never punched a clock. Making people happy, and they're making me happy."

"Other s—t goes on," he says. "But when you come to our show, man, you forget about your problems, the mortgage, the insurance, the housing. You come, you release. The 4R's: Rebirth, Relax, Relate, Release. Forget about all this other stuff. The music takes you to another level. You might go home to half a house, but you sleep better that night. That's what I hope our music does to people. That's our *obligation.* The bad and the good stand side by side. I have tragedy. But I'm a stronger person. I can take it. Keep on goin'. Try to make it better. When I play in New Orleans, I play like this is the last time I'm ever going to play again. What if the city really is sunk? I play like the hell with it. I play like I might never come back to this again. I play like it's my last year of livin'. That's how I play."

His brother, Keith "Bass Drum Shorty" Frazier, is less sanguine. One night at dinner at Tujague's in the Quarter, Keith tells me that what ails this place you can't "solve by blowing a trumpet or hitting a drum." After the levees broke, "I lost everything—it was gone. There's not enough money in the world to get me back here. I'll never come back [to live]. Never, ever." He evacuated to Dallas, where he's stayed.

Sure, he misses Two Sisters soul food restaurant, and the people. And when they play New Orleans music to the diaspora (in Houston or Atlanta or wherever), he's physically moved. It's like bringing them a photo album that they thought had been destroyed. But the people who are still here are "walking wounded," he says. "They don't even know it. They think they're all right. Phil had a barber friend who committed suicide. Black people don't commit suicide. It just doesn't happen. Man, that s—t is crazy. People think it's over, but it ain't gonna be over for a long, long time."

Besides, he's seen the future of this place—it'll be Disney World, or some dipsomaniac version of it. Donald Trump's already planning a residential and retail project on Poydras—the beginning of the end. His new home is cleaner and safer. He's a Cowboys fan anyway, and his daughter goes to a better school. "Everything's done by

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the book," Keith says. "You go to work, get off at 5, eat dinner, go back to work. It's not as laid back. It's very boring." When he's there, he doesn't even think about playing music, or the storm, or the things he's lost. He almost sounds convincing. Though sometimes, he admits, when he's walking around in this foreign environment, he does have one thought: "How the f— did I end up in Dallas?"

I try to spend Mardi Gras day like a good tourist—on Bourbon Street. But I am quickly fatigued by all the other tourists: fat and pink and naked and drunk. They pour out of karaoke bars and clip joints into the street, where the bottoms of their shoes will grow sticky with the residue of spilled drinks and body fluids. They will have fistfights over imaginary grievances, proving yet again that Jager shots and testosterone don't mix. They will applaud the gospeler who holds the "I'm sorry" sign, apologizing for the other street preachers who are telling them they'll go to Hell. It never occurs to them, however, that Hell would be a redundancy under the circumstances. They're already on Bourbon Street.

For respite, I go back where I started—the Maple Leaf—for the Rebirth's Tuesday night gig. During a break between sets, I go up onstage to bid farewell to the musicians, who like to split right after the show. The General and I take a seat on a stage step, and something comes over me. I feel compelled to tell him that he's an exceptional talent, that he makes people happy, and that's better than most of us will ever do. Then I caution him not to waste himself, not to get enveloped in the darkness that surrounds him.

I prattle on in this vein for awhile, and am, of course, way over the line. I half expect him to tell me to get bent, or to make a quick getaway to Smoker's Alley outside, but he doesn't. Instead, he tucks his head and nods intently. He claps my back, and repeatedly reaches to shake my hand, as if to signal me that though we both know I've overstepped my reporter/subject bounds, he appreciates the effort.

I go back to my place in the audience. It's a Fat Tuesday crowd, so there isn't room to breathe. The band likes to joke that the surest way to get Phil not to call a song is to request it. And all week long, I've been requesting "Blackbird Special," an old Dirty Dozen number that the Rebirth does better. When I do, Phil says to me, "I don't know what I'm gonna call. I gotta feel it in here," as he pounds his chest. Maybe he feels it now, or maybe he's just humoring me. But they play it.

The song is one of my near-and-dears. When my first son was just old enough to sit up, I used to plop him in front of the speakers and play it off Rebirth's "Live at the Maple Leaf" album—much like The General blowing his horn for his unborn daughter. My son would swing his arms wildly, and his hips would vibrate as the Frazier brothers' bassline rolled up his spine.

The band is cooking tonight—everybody doing his part. Phil bumps and pumps with his sousaphone, twisting sideways while simultaneously firing up and down like a piston. Bass Drum Shorty is throwing rocks in the lake, booming with his right hand while his left rides the hi-hat with a flathead. Big Sexy is banging like he's trying to bore a hole in the floor. The front line has hoisted the black flag; there will be no hostages taken this evening. Khabuki and The General, in particular, are on fire. Almost literally, in Khabuki's case. The room is so hot, even with the doors open in winter, that he has stripped to the waist, and is slicked with sweat like a welterweight fighter doing twelve rounds on a heavy bag.

I watch The General, in his tank T-shirt and his blue Kangol hat, aim his horn toward the sky as he gets lost in the song. It feels like I'm watching New Orleans itself: raw and rude, bold and brilliant, improvisational and soulful and damaged. And maybe it can't save itself, but it's a grievous mistake to think it's not worth saving.

The crowd pitches and rolls and rattles and stomps. Humidity droplets form on the walls, while Rebirth's horns ricochet off the ceiling and out into the back courtyard/cemetery where the Maple Leaf's poet laureate rests in peace—at least the part of him that hasn't washed out to the Gulf of Mexico. Amidst the controlled chaos, I wonder what New Orleans will look like if I visit in 15 years.

I strongly suspect I won't be seeing Rebirth at funky dives, standing next to gold-toothed second liners with names like The Busdriver and Chocolate Swerve. I suspect that if the city hasn't by then collapsed on itself, I'll be taking in "The New Orleans Experience" by monorail. Our tour guide (from Appleton, Wisconsin) will direct our attention to the overlit streets of the Treme, now studded with Banana Republics and Panera Breads. He will tell us how all the spirited black people used to march behind men with giant sousaphones, as we are served heavily breaded fried shrimp, harvested fresh from Ore-Ida bags, with a ketchup remoulade. The soundtrack on the speakers will be from the Big Easy Tribute Album: Josh Groban sings "Rebirth Got Fire"—with strings! I will be a good sport, and nod my head in time with the other tourists, as I die a little inside.

But those are tomorrow's worries. Because tonight, Tuba Phil has called my song. And some of the baddest men on the planet, the Rebirth Brass Band, are playing it. They play in a fever. They play loud and hard and fierce. They play like they're avenging a death.

And who knows? Maybe they are. ♦

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Death of a Hero

Robert Falcon Scott reappraised

BY JAMES BOWMAN

Topical Press Agency / Getty Images

Scott's flagship, SS Terra Nova*, icebound in 1913*

Right at the end of his biography of the great British polar explorer, Robert Falcon Scott, David Crane writes: "For most of his life there had been a widening gap between the idealist on the page and the flawed man, but it is the Scott of the page, and not of everyday life, that is the *real* Scott, and in the tent they at last became one."

Ponder those words a moment. If they were to be taken to heart by the fellowship of biographers of which Crane is so distinguished a member, they would revolutionize the entire trade, which for most of the last century has been operating on the assumption that not only Scott's but everybody's "flawed man" is the "real" one. Why, you might almost think that Crane was advocating a return to the sardonic lesson of *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*: "When the legend becomes fact, print the legend."

Of course, he is doing no such thing.

Scott of the Antarctic
A Life of Courage and Tragedy
by David Crane
Knopf, 592 pp., $30

That passage is just a gesture, a caveat, a momentary acknowledgment by (perhaps) his own "flawed man" within that, having spent so much time in the presence of a genuine hero, he can't leave him without noting that there is something *real* about heroism that makes the flaws he has tried so hard to sniff out seem trivial by comparison.

"The tent" referred to is, of course, where Scott and his companions perished on their return journey from the South Pole in March 1912. Having walked well over a thousand miles to the pole and back, over some of the most forbidding terrain on earth, while pulling sleds weighing hundreds of pounds—and having found on getting there that they had been beaten to the pole by the dog sleds of Scott's Norwegian rival, Roald Amundsen—they died in a blizzard, unable to move and having exhausted food and fuel, 11 miles from succor.

James Bowman, resident scholar at the Ethics and Public Policy Center, is the author of Honor: A History.

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Robert Falcon Scott, 1901

Time & Life Pictures / Getty Images

That tragic and heroic death made Scott more idolized and idealized by the popular culture in Britain than any man since Nelson, who also had a heroic death, a century earlier. Such adulation could not but have served as an invitation to biographers of the debunking kind—and Crane very briefly to the contrary notwithstanding, there has been no other kind for many years now. In Scott's case, the most comprehensive debunking came at the hands of Roland Huntford, whose *Scott and Amundsen* (published in the United States in 1979 as *The Last Place on Earth*) dragged Scott's flawed man, or something that could pass for him, out from behind the curtain of his legend and paraded him for all to see.

Crane's biography should be counted among those that have since sought to rehabilitate at least some of the great man's greatness, though Crane is (of course) very far from being uncritical. But his efforts are hobbled by the fact that he still has one foot in the trap of late 20th-century cultural assumptions, and in particular the assumption that, in my view, lies behind all the controversy about Scott: namely, that the Victorian and Edwardian honor culture was a disastrous failure. It is only on the basis of this assumption that the subsidiary question of whether Scott himself (always considered at the time one of the shining examples of that culture) was a failure, or not, can be answered.

Was he, in other words, a failure because the honor culture was a failure? Or was he a success in spite of the failure of the honor culture? The one view that is never considered by Crane, any more than it is by any others of Scott's biographers for the last generation, is the one that prevailed at the time of his death—that he was the vindication of that culture, and his failure showed its success.

The reasons for this circumscription of the discussion are too complex to sort out here, but it is scarcely controversial to note that the word "honor" and its compounds and derivatives were frequently in the mouths of Scott and his admirers and supporters, just as they were in those of a great many Britons of the period, and that the word today, if heard at all, is likely to carry with it pejorative connotations, as in "honor-killing."

Huntford and Scott's other detractors tend to stress what they see as Scott's bumbling amateurism as an explorer, and to regard his death not as heroic but as another reason for the discrediting of the Edwardian sportsman's cult of the amateur. Not that, you'd think, any more reasons were necessary after the pummeling that particular *beau idéal* has taken over the last 70 or 80 years! For all Crane's sympathy with Scott, examples of his "incompetence"—a word used to describe even the most trivial and inevitable failures and mistakes—stud his prose like raisins in a fruitcake. Nor is Crane above the portentous drawing of significance from these by frequent peeks over the horizon to such celebrated disasters of the First World War as Jutland or the Somme.

There is a kind of stern, unbending techno-military puritanism about such criticisms—as if the norm were perfection and any deviation from it, therefore, a moral reproach to the commander—which is also becoming routine in the ever-more strident critiques in the media and Congress of the Iraq war. This seems particularly unfair as an approach to those, like Scott, who a

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century-and-a-half ago were bred up in an honor culture most of whose tenets were designed as stratagems to cope with failure.

It's also a failure not to recognize this, as when Crane comments: "As astonishing as any of the miseries of this journey is the spirit with which they were borne." His astonishment must be due to his assumption that this is just a curious fact picked up along the way and not the essence of the honor culture that he is writing about without (quite) knowing it. The result is a schizophrenic quality to this book, since most of what it finds to criticize about Scott is also what it finds to admire.

Most admirable of all is, surely, the Herculean self-restraint—or, in critical mode, emotional repression—that was required of Scott to do what he did and to become the man he was. Here, for instance, is what *Scott of the Antarctic* has to say about Scott's own book about his first Antarctic expedition in 1901-04, *The Voyage of the Discovery*:

> There are problems with the book—excisions, launderings and "quotations" from the original diaries that are not the literal transcriptions that they might seem—but these are no more or less than might be expected. Behind these silences and evasions lay the long and discreet tradition of Victorian biography, and if Lytton Strachey was already waiting in the wings, it would no more have occurred to Scott to air old grievances and dislikes than it would his modern successor to leave them out. One could read the near-thousand pages of *The Voyage of the Discovery* and never know that there had been any tensions in the wardroom, that Scott had made Ferrar cry, that Barne had nearly lost them half a dozen men, or Armitage had spent the last year sulking in his tent. It plainly suited Scott's purposes to project an image of contented unity to the Admiralty and to the public, and yet the real point is that there would not have been a single man in the ship—not even Armitage at this stage—who would have wanted it told differently or not closed ranks around the "myth" perpetrated in his expedition history.

Do I detect in those quotation marks festooning the word "myth" the dawning of a highly subversive recognition that myth is not just the creeping moss that it is the biographer's job to clear out of his garden, but something with a truth-value of its own? One of the most striking things about Captain Scott to emerge from this biography is his quickness with praise for the honorable, noble, unselfish, eager, uncomplaining, hard-working, generous behavior of others, down to the lowliest members of his team. We are no more to imagine that these others were actually (if we could know them in every intimate detail) without fault any more than he, himself, was. But he sets us an example of how to look at men in order to bring out the best in them, and it seems only fair and equitable that we, like so many of his contemporaries who reciprocated in the warmest terms, should do as much—and rather more than David Crane does—for him.

As for Scott as the precursor of World War I in the discrediting of the British honor culture, we may again have reason to think that the last word was said by Scott's great companion, Apsley Cherry-Garrard, the author of what is still the finest account of the last expedition, *The Worst Journey in the World*: "A war is like the Antarctic in one respect. There is no getting out of it with honour as long as you can put one foot before the other." ♦

Forget Me Not

How fantasy and truth complicate two lives.

BY SHAWN MACOMBER

When Anthony, the teenaged narrator of *The Amnesia Clinic*, explains early on that his nickname "Anti" evolved out of an inability to pronounce his own name as a toddler, he ruefully notes, "Just one example of how a perfectly innocent mistake can stay with you forever."

The Amnesia Clinic
by James Scudamore
Harcourt, 304 pp., $23

It doesn't take a pilgrimage to the Great Oracle to realize this won't be the only, or even the greatest, mistake made over the course of the novel. Yet this artful coming-of-age-on-the-razor's-edge tale—sentimental and humorous one moment, nightmarish the next—is anything but a rote hurtling toward a foreshadowed conclusion. James Scudamore skillfully weaves a wonderfully complex web of stories and counterstories, telling and retelling climactic events from various perspectives, exposing the fluidity of truth and the retributive nature of reality denied. In *The Amnesia Clinic*, the fabulist lamb is ultimately never quite able to lie down with the realist lion.

The novel is set in a beautifully rendered Ecuador on the brink of war with Peru. Anti is a hopelessly awkward 15-year-old English transplant befriended by Fabian, a well-off, popular Ecuadorian. "A languid panther to my wheezing albino pig" is Anti's unceremonious summation, but for Fabian, still reeling from the recent death of his parents, the friendship is not charity: "When I first arrived I had a way of staring at perfectly normal things as if I had landed on an alien planet, and Fabian liked provoking it," Anti explains. The English boy's hyper-awareness of his exotic new locale allows Fabian to shift away

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from agonizing memories by reinventing his life and surroundings into something less painful, more heroic.

Anti quickly becomes an accomplice, acknowledging that "'the truth' was something with which Fabian and I were fairly free." It remains innocent enough at first. "Anything could have happened in that cupboard, couldn't it?" Anti asks Fabian, after the latter brags about a manifestly false schoolhouse sexual conquest.

> "You're right," Fabian would say. "Anything could have happened. Anything from full penetrative sex through to a bit of harmless flirting followed by a kick in the balls."
>
> "So on that scale of possibility, what would a really unimaginative person say had happened in that cupboard?"
>
> "The unimaginative person would probably say that he followed Verena into the cupboard hoping to cop a feel, but that she bashed him round the head with a foolscap folder before making him carry about three tons of paper back to the classroom for her. Something like that."
>
> "How unimaginative."
>
> "Quite. How disappointing."

Stakes are raised, though, when Anti learns Fabian's parents died in a car wreck—from which his mother's body was thrown into the Ecuadorian jungle and never found—not by a tragic bullfight goring as he told Anti, hardly a lighthearted fib. Coupled with Fabian's professed vision of his mother's apparition during an earthquake, the stage is set for a collision between what is and what is not.

As excessive as such stories may seem, Anti and Fabian nevertheless see a tacit approval of untruth in their genetic makeup. Fabian describes his father as someone who "tried as he could to be what he thought was a European" by listening to Spanish classical music and trying to dance "the *pasadoble* like some flamenco expert." And the boy's new guardian, Uncle Suarez, tells his own tall tales, confiding that "I gave up long ago the unfortunate habit of believing the mere plausible."

Meanwhile, Anti's mother, so disapproving of Suarez the fabulist, is nevertheless a "painfully earnest" European woman serving as an academic cheerleader for Ecuadorian *indigenas* "reclaiming their birthright and redressing centuries of repression." Anti's father, once a former West African correspondent for Reuters, was fired after making up a press release on a slow news day.

James Scudamore

HARCOURT / Rose Grimond

The final die is cast when Anti resolves a meaningless quarrel with Fabian not by apology or schoolyard tussle, but with a mock-up newspaper article inventing the Amnesia Clinic and placing clues throughout suggesting Fabian's mother might be a patient there. Anti does so believing he and Fabian have "an unspoken understanding" that "we both knew when things had gone too far from the realm of the plausible."

Not so. Before Anti can get a handle on the unintended consequences, he and Fabian have set out for a rural Ecuadorian village on a quest for the nonexistent care center for the memory challenged.

Anti admits to possessing a cowardice that "can generally be relied upon in any given situation." This attribute acts as an innate self-defense mechanism to keep him from advancing beyond lines, imaginary or otherwise, he is ill-prepared to cross. Unfortunately, en route to the Amnesia Clinic, Anti discovers that Fabian is mixing an all-too-real courage with his self-delusion. Once the boys are off the grid, Fabian descends into an impenetrable and dangerous fantasy world, "showily dodging the obstacles put in his way by reality."

"Didn't you ever wait a few days after buying your lottery ticket before you checked the numbers, just to allow yourself to think you might have won something?" Anti asks Fabian as he gently attempts to reveal the Amnesia Clinic is fiction.

"I don't play the lottery," Fabian answers.

And so the world is encapsulated and divided. Anti's renunciation of the Amnesia Clinic story means nothing to Fabian. Nihilistic survivor guilt and pure desire have transferred ownership of the story into his hands. Anti's naiveté and the callousness of boyhood vie for blame for the ensuing tragedy as he, to his horror, discovers, like Dr. Frankenstein before him, that you cannot always kill the monsters you create. The fantasy is not the same for one as it is for the other.

"Fabian's world was fantastic because it *needed* to be," Suarez snarls. "What's your excuse?" Call it by the same name, seek it at the same longitude and latitude, it does not matter. An agreed-upon surrender to fantasy often leaves one powerless to earn mercy from reality. ♦

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Friends in Need

Understanding the alliance of Zionists and Christian Zionists. **BY ABBY WISSE SCHACHTER**

Why did Israeli-American journalist Zev Chafets write a book about Jews and evangelicals? Two words: Alan Dershowitz. The Harvard law professor has spent the better part of the last three years crusading for the need to support Israel. He's given lectures and interviews, written books and opinion pieces on the strategic and moral importance of standing with Israel. Now, Dershowitz has a new book coming out titled *Blasphemy: How the Religious Right is Hijacking the Declaration of Independence*. Rather than advocating once again for the Jewish state, he's chosen a seemingly unrelated topic: Attacking evangelicals and their supposed efforts to "Christianize America."

A Match Made in Heaven
American Jews, Christian Zionists, and One Man's Exploration of the Weird and Wonderful Judeo-Evangelical Alliance
by Zev Chafets
HarperCollins, 240 pp., $24.95

Except, as Chafets points out in his study of relations between Jewish Zionists and Christian Zionists, Dershowitz's new book is *very* related. Indeed, Dershowitz perfectly represents the dilemma that Chafets is trying to unlock: Why Jews can't seem to tolerate, let alone embrace, the fastest-growing Christian movement in America, a movement that views support for Israel as central to its mission.

Chafets is not a great polemicist; he's a terrific journalist. He's at his best when he's telling human stories, giving readers a real sense of people and places. He spent years in Israel, working as head of the government press office, writing books and helping to found *The Jerusalem Report*. In Israel, he was a moderate Liberal, supporting the idea of land for peace with the Palestinians while remaining ever mindful of Israel's security needs. When he moved back to the United States, Chafets discovered that, especially after 9/11, he was out of sync with the mainstream of American Jewry. He voted for George W. Bush, agrees with the aims of the war on terror, and got curious about the vocal and passionate Christian voices he heard speaking out in support of Israel.

Just how out of sync was he? One Jewish guest at a birthday party told Chafets that "A Jew who voted for Bush is a Jew for Jesus." *A Match Made in Heaven* is his effort to get to know Christian Zionists, understand why they are so supportive of Israel, and educate American Jews that they should reconsider their negative attitude. "Evangelical Christians," Chafets writes, "are, in an unprecedented way, extending a hand of friendship and wartime alliance to Jews; and the ancient tribal instinct to slap that hand away is a dangerous one."

The part of the book devoted to "discovering" evangelicals is more light-hearted. Here is Chafets with Jerry Falwell at Liberty University; join Chafets touring Israel with a colorful cast of evangelical pilgrims; watch as Chafets handily rebuffs the conversion efforts of a Baptist church secretary on the phone from Pontiac, Michigan. He writes about evangelicals with genuine interest and curiosity, but also skepticism. He is forever asking his interviewees whether they think he's going to hell or whether they want to convert him. One subject finally turns the tables, demanding of Chafets—and Jews generally—"why not judge us by our fruits?" It's a legitimate question that gets a halfhearted response.

When Chafets shifts his attention to Jews, he gets more serious and drops the skepticism. Chafets meets with Yechiel Eckstein, the Orthodox rabbi turned televangelist, who is raising millions from Zionist Christians to help Israel. But he spends more time describing Jews who are openly fighting Zionist Christians. Abe Foxman of the Anti-Defamation League, for example, has been campaigning against what he describes as the Religious Right's efforts to "Christianize America." But as Chafets discovers, religion or religious coercion aren't really the problem: Politics is the problem. Most Jews aren't really worried about proselytizing evangelicals, or even Christian Zionists' belief in Armageddon. What Jews hate are Republicans and the conservative agenda, even if that agenda is much more pro-Israel.

Chafets has a conversation with Shira Dicker. She's a public relations consultant, a mainstream liberal Jew, and very pro-Israel. Chafets even met her while she was doing PR for Yechiel Eckstein's annual evangelical-Israel lovefest. When he interviewed Dicker after the conference, she admitted she couldn't abide evangelicals. Dicker was angry that a prayer had been said, even though it was delivered by a Jew.

"I wasn't comfortable," she told him. "I've come to see that their leaders are corrupt, horrible people. People in cahoots with Bush. If we cede power to right-wing Christians, we'll be marginalized. We'll have a Christian America. To me it's a moral issue."

But, asks Chafets, are her objections moral or political? "I guess the issue is more that they are Republicans than they are evangelicals," she replies. Shira Dicker isn't really worried about America becoming more Christian; she hates that the country is more *Republican*.

For the fact is that Dicker, like Alan Dershowitz, and like most American Jews, is more committed to the liberal Democratic political agenda than she

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is to Israel. Unlike evangelicals, these Jews didn't see Israel's security trumping everything else. They can't bring themselves to make common cause with conservative Zionist Christians because they hate the conservative agenda more than they love Israel.

Chafets has a warning for Dicker, Dershowitz, and the rest: The hand of friendship is being offered in good faith, and for a limited time. "Jews and evangelicals are major stakeholders is opposing parties," he writes. "But the Judeo-Christian bargain doesn't require Jews to become Republicans, much less Christians. It simply requires a change in attitude and tone."

He is putting the case simplistically in order not to offend the very Jews he wants to attract, and that is where his book falters. Jews have a lot more work to do than just changing their tone. ♦

Watch on the Rhine

Barbarians at the gate—of the Roman empire.

BY J.E. LENDON

When the pans dredged from the river are lined up in a museum, as if on identity parade, it looks as though all the cookware in Roman Germany had banded together, commandeered a wagon, and made a break for freedom over the Rhine.

In fact, the pans had accomplices: the barbarian Alamanni, who invaded the Roman empire in A.D. 259. When the raiders turned for home, they took with them wagons piled high with loot. But perhaps in the face of Roman counterattack, or perhaps because a raft was greedily overloaded, one of those wagons, carrying nearly a ton of metal goods, toppled into the Rhine.

Rome's Gothic Wars
by Michael Kulikowski
Cambridge, 238 pp., $25

What German scholars call with pleasant irony the "barbarian treasure" from Neupotz, exhibited last year at Speyer, contains some coins and a few handsome bits of silver. But most of the thousand-odd metal objects are the most prosaic imaginable: pots and more pots (carefully packed for transport, the little ones nested in the big ones, like an Ikea starter set for newlyweds), casserole dishes and strainers, plates and cups, bowls and kettles and spoons, carafes and water jugs, carving knives and wood-axes, cooking racks and smithy tongs, files and hammers, chisels and awls and adzes, wool shears and sheep-bells, horseshoes and lengths of chain. And metal door-locks, too, laboriously cut from the doors they once protected.

Study of this piled junk reveals that it did not come from the area of Germany where it was found, but instead from Limousin in the southwest of France, over 350 miles away as the crow flies (and crows are bad at pulling wagons). A little epic of human effort ended when the wagon and its pots clattered into the river.

You've got to wonder about a people who would walk round-trip the distance from New York to Peoria to plunder Kmart. And from that wonder come misgivings about the new school of late Roman history, "Barbarian Studies" (named from the prophetic *New Yorker* cartoon depicting two horsemen bristling with weapons, and a third wearing a tweed jacket and smoking a pipe, captioned "Two barbarians and a professor of barbarian studies").

According to this school, of which Michael Kulikowski's *Rome's Gothic Wars* is exemplary, any high jinks the barbarians got up to were always, deep down, the Romans' fault. A naturally peaceful folk were militarized by Roman aggression born of imperial politics and the emperor's need to find martial busywork for his soldiers. Scholars had examined Roman-barbarian relations since the days of Edward Gibbon, and found plenty of fault on either side: Only now has Rome become the sole garden of dark flowers; only now has the Roman empire become Mordor.

Roman authors, of course, had a different view: They tended to regard the barbarians as, well, barbarians. Barbarians raided and invaded because they were greedy and aggressive, or because they were pushed over the Roman border by tribes more greedy and aggressive than they. The Professor of Barbarian Studies dismisses these ancient views as prejudice.

"That sort of essentialist explanation can hardly be enough for us," he sniffs, while cheerfully applying exactly the same kind of explanation to the Romans. In blaming the Romans for barbarian attacks in the third through fifth centuries A.D., he slights the detail—upon which the Romans themselves remarked—that Rome's relations with her neighbors changed over the course of her long history. Once upon a time the Romans had, indeed, been extremely aggressive, but after Augustus' loss of Varus' three legions in Germany in A.D. 9, Rome for the most part stood on the defensive behind her Rhine and Danube river borders.

Tacitus, appalled by this newfound meekness, tells us why: The calculus of autocracy made military aggression too dangerous for the regime. Defeats undermined imperial power, and victories raised up successful generals as rivals to the purple. The professor's insistence that "military victories were a vital legitimizing device for imperial power" would have puzzled a number of Roman emperors of the first and second centuries A.D., who felt quite free to do without such victories, prefer-

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Time & Life / Getty Images

The Roman legions, under Belisarius, attack the Goths.

ring to root their power in the protection of a prosperous peace. Even the ubiquitous traces of fourth-century Rome's defensive-mindedness, the fortifications along the Rhine and Danube strengthened in such desperation and at such cost, can be dismissed as "grandiose" manifestations of eccentric pride or made part of Rome's aggressive plans: The new castles "could serve as advance posts for Roman military action."

Trying to recover the barbarian point of view can be useful. Kulikowski is right to wonder whether the Goths, in fact, wandered from afar onto Rome's Danube border, as the romantic tradition has it, or whether they were simply a league of tribes already there, like their kin the Alamanni (the chagrined and exhausted drivers of the wagon full of pans) further west. He is right to support his case with an account of the archaeology of the Gothic domains, where so many ways of life mixed and where the boundaries between archaeological cultures match poorly with the tribal borders suggested by historical accounts. (But potential readers may justly suspect from this last sentence that *Rome's Gothic Wars* is a book with much academic argument and little thrill of the adventure of history.)

Kulikowski is right to emphasize the role of Roman favoritism in the rise of barbarian powers like the Goths, whose Rome-supported local dominance could make them very dangerous enemies for the empire, when the empire appeared weak. But Roman interests, too, need to be taken seriously: The main reason Rome promoted the power of favorites among the barbarians was to have stable borders—in order that friendly, strong barbarians should intimidate the less friendly ones. If Rome had really valued the barbarians chiefly as punching bags to produce the easy victories needed to prop up the imperial regime, she would have wanted to keep all her neighbors weak, rather than make some of them strong.

Why Barbarian Studies' vilification of Rome, in the face of ancient testimony and modern common sense? Both the old Romans and their students today can be smug, and near-irresistible targets for a good, sharp poke. But by old and unhappy convention we also identify our own civilization—and, since the Cold War, the United States in particular—with Rome. Once before, historians decided that the Romans—much older Romans, those before 100 B.C.—were aggressive and wicked: They did so activated by the passions of Vietnam. Now there is another American war unpopular in the universities. Could that be why the Romans are once again to blame?

The journey of the Alamanni wagon reminds us that all ancient peoples were greedy, that many, like the Alamanni and the Goths, were both greedy and needy, and that ancient people were, for the most part, far more aggressive and warlike than we are.

The wonder is that amidst all the greed, need, and aggression, a people—the imperial Romans—ultimately forsook the conquest of farther acres, and used the preponderance of their power to establish, however imperfectly, the Roman Peace. The pans in the Rhine hint at the hazard of trying to establish a civilization of peace in a world of barbarians. ♦

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Y'all's History

Or, defending the South, Yankee style.

BY CHARLOTTE HAYS

Time & Life Pictures / Alfred Eisenstaedt

Gownsmen at the University of the South (Sewanee), 1940

Once I told my uncle that I love the South so much I would die for it. Yes, replied the venerable oldster, but you won't *live* here. True, but I have every intention of awaiting the final trump under a crepe myrtle in the Mississippi Delta, and so I feel I have the bona fides to take on this latest entry in Regnery's generally enjoyable P.I.G. series.

The Politically Incorrect Guide to the South
(And Why It Will Rise Again)
by Clint Johnson
Regnery, 288 pp., $19.95

Charlotte Hays is coauthor of the forthcoming Somebody is Going to Die if Lilly Beth Doesn't Catch That Bouquet: The Official Southern Ladies' Guide to Hosting the Perfect Wedding.

The South is under an assault today almost as mean-spirited as when Mr. Lincoln let loose the great arsonist upon our ancestors. Northern liberals deride us because we have kissed and made up with the party that ran Reconstruction, helping keep a president despised by the *soi-disant* enlightened in office. Thomas Schaller's recently published nasty book *Whistling Past Dixie* opines that the South is racist and that Democrats had better develop a winning strategy that doesn't require our benighted votes. Clearly, it is time to fight back.

Johnson—whose previous credits include a book about one of the two greatest men who ever lived, Robert Edward Lee (Jesus is the other, of course, though it's hard to keep them straight in my mind)—is, alas, not the general to conduct our campaign. He has the decency to want to be a southerner. But he is from Florida, a state that was helpful during the late hostilities, but is by no means culturally southern.

It shows. Who but a Floridian—or a Yankee—would try to explain the South without mentioning by name Quentin Compson, the haunted southerner who ended his life at Harvard (if only he'd gone to Sewanee!), or his sister Caddy, the quintessential southern loose leg, as we call women who can't say no? (I know Faulkner made them up, but they are real to me.) Johnson also fails to note, even in passing, Sir Walter Scott, often credited with starting the Civil War because he puffed us up with notions of chivalry. I've never been in a "nice" southern house that didn't boast a set of Scott's *Waverley* novels. I had them even when I was living in a bed sit.

While nothing is more painful to a loyal daughter of the South than having the Confederacy compared to Nazi Germany, Johnson's attempt to rescue the CSA's reputation, though well-intended, is misguided. He argues like a Yankee, pursuing a line beloved of paleocon intellectuals from places like Ohio (and Florida?): That the Civil War was caused, not by our peculiar institution, but by tariffs or Lincoln's abrogation of states' rights. Johnson's designated cause of the war seems to be the long-forgotten Morrill Tariff. This kind of argument makes your head hurt, and especially a century-and-a-half after the event at Appomattox, our fealty is a matter of the heart, not arcane arguments.

We're like Lee—or was it Jesus?—who was offered command of the Union Army but refused because he could not go against Virginia. (Just for the record, I'd flat-out admit that it's just as well that we lost, except that to do so would trigger an earthquake on that aforementioned cemetery plot where I plan to rest.)

Johnson is right that the southern

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colonies "birthed" the New World. It is odd, then, that he deals with Jamestown—where ladies and gentlemen, cavaliers all and stalwarts of the Established Church, had brought civilization a full 13 years before those tacky dissenters ever set foot on Plymouth Rock—only in terms of slavery. I knew Marxist historians thought this way, but a southern apologist? Of course there is a twist: Johnson dwells at length on the saga of one Anthony Johnson, a black man who owned slaves and won a lawsuit that contributed to the legalization of slavery on these shores. (Hey, it's their fault.) Johnson also argues—disingenuously—that the reason the southern states insisted that slaves be counted in the Constitution as three-fifths of a person is evidence of our belief in their humanity!

The real reason southerners wanted to count slaves as partial human beings was that the South wanted to counter the North's larger population. We had no intention of allowing these partial human beings to pool their humanity into votes. On the subject of slavery, Johnson vacillates between apologies and excuses. Let's face it: Slavery is perhaps not the best ground on which to take our stand.

Like Johnson, I am saddened when the Confederate battle flag and other historic artifacts are demeaned. But one of his examples of southerners succumbing to political correctness is bizarre: "The president of the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee, founded by Confederate Leonidas Polk, is rebranding the university under the Sewanee name."

I don't know how that venerable institution has been affected by developments in the Episcopal Church, but I do know that no place on earth is less interested in "rebranding" than Sewanee. It was called Sewanee when my ancient uncles were there, and I'll lay you 5 to 10 that Leonidas Polk, the key figure in the university's founding, called it Sewanee. A real southerner would never level such an accusation at Sewanee.

Leonidas Polk, incidentally, was a bishop of the Episcopal Church and a general in the Confederate army. Johnson describes him as a "terrible" general. It doesn't matter. If you want to know what southerners love about the South, you have only to look at the famous picture of Polk in the puffed sleeves of a bishop with his sword and Confederate uniform on a chair beside him. By golly, even southern bishops were fighting men! The image says something about the dignity of taking up arms that other parts of the country need to relearn.

There are some nice touches in the book. He offers a guide to the characters of *Gone with the Wind*, a book my mother read during her pregnancies in the same spirit that Yankee mothers play Mozart for an unborn child. Rhett Butler is evidence that southern men are "dangerous in the moonlight." There are also sidebars with quotes from southern authors and others that really do tell you a lot about being southern. They include Faulkner's wonderful evocation of a southern boy's feeling that George Pickett's charge hasn't yet happened and the world is full of possibilities.

But mostly this is a Yankeefied defense of the South. Does Johnson even know which way the statue of the Confederate soldier on the courthouse lawn faces? He seems to believe that the honey-toned Civil War historian/novelist Shelby Foote made the famous observation that the South was the one part of the country that had lost a war. This is no longer true, and Shelby Foote didn't say it. The comment is actually from another southern historian, C. Vann Woodward.

I do not venture to set the record straight because Shelby Foote's bad dog Beau tore up my mother's flower beds when Foote was a curmudgeonly (and not yet famous) neighbor across Washington Avenue in Greenville, Mississippi, but in the high name of historical accuracy. ♦

Founder Reader

Perusing the books of John Adams, bibliophile.

BY EDWARD ACHORN

John Adams was nuts for books. Though he wasn't nearly as well off as Jefferson or Washington, Adams spent extravagantly on leather-bound volumes of literature, history, law, and political philosophy, and plunged into them with ravenous interest. Terrified that he might "live and die an ignorant, obscure fellow," he used books as his tools in constructing a vast tower of knowledge about man and politics, from which he could peer down at the common herd.

John Adams Unbound
Boston Public Library
Through April 29, 2007

At 21, he designed a reading program: to rise at dawn and read the Scriptures on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday mornings; and to study ancient authors in Latin on the other three mornings. He would devote his remaining free time around noon and at night to English authors. He was soon kicking himself in his diary for slipping at his reading regimen: "Let no trifling Diversion or amuzement or Company decoy you from your Books, *i.e.*, let no Girl, no Gun, no cards, no flutes, no Violins, no Dress, no Tobacco, no Laziness, decoy you from your Books."

Perpetually disappointed in something or other, often including himself, Adams inevitably failed to eliminate all

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Black Star Photos / Rick Friedman

The Adams Homestead library, Quincy, Massachusetts

diversions. But his restless ambition did produce results, eventually turning him into one of the most consequential figures in history—a man whose deep knowledge of human nature and experience helped shape a brilliantly conceived nation, with its stolid federal and state constitutions constraining and balancing government power.

Adams was the go-to man in the Continental Congress for advice about making state constitutions; and he himself devised the Massachusetts constitution, which greatly influenced the federal plan. His fellow revolutionary and friend Benjamin Rush said the Founding generation believed Adams possessed "more learning probably, both ancient and modern, than any man who subscribed the Declaration of Independence." C. Bradley Thompson, in *John Adams & The Spirit of Liberty* (1998), reinforced that view: "No one, not even Thomas Jefferson or James Madison, read as much or thought as long and hard about questions of human nature, natural right, political organization, and constitutional construction."

It is fair to say that, without Adams and his well-thumbed library, we—and countless others who have benefited from America's existence—would not be enjoying the freedom we have today. Remarkably, thousands of his books have survived, and you can explore this seed of our liberty at the Boston Public Library.

Step inside the door, and you see on your left a massive bookcase—12-feet high by 40-feet long—holding more than 3,000 volumes from Adams's personal collection, from Aristotle to Machiavelli, from Cervantes to Swift to Locke. That totemic case, so emblematic of Adams's mighty intellect and love of learning, may seem daunting. But to the right of the entrance, under glass, is a slender volume, spread open to a page on which he's scrawled a note: "Blenheim, which I saw in Ap. 1786 with Mr. Jefferson." It's a gardening book, a copy of which Thomas Jefferson held when he and Adams toured some of the great gardens of Britain in April 1786, years before Jefferson's political backstabbing ended their friendship (for a time). At some point, Adams bought his own copy and annotated it.

And if that doesn't make you smile—the thought of Adams and Jefferson in their prime, chatting away and enjoying a spring day together—you may be dead to the joys of history.

One of the great delights of Adams's library is that he wrote with a quill pen in hand, making observations in the margins, some of them wry, some of them arguments with the author, as if to set the historical record straight, on the odd chance that someone, someday, might care what he wrote in his books. The Adams here is, engagingly, the Adams we well know: too testy, too cranky, too sarcastic, too open with his wounded feelings and failings to fit the marble-statue treatment accorded other Founders.

Thus, in his personal copy of his own notorious *Discourses on Davila*, from which his political enemies (Jefferson included) drew passages out of context to attack him, he complains: "This dull, heavy Volume Still excites the Wonder of its Author. . . . The Work, however, powerfully operated to destroy his Popularity. It was urged as full Proof that he was an Advocate for Monarchy."

In another note, he bemoans the "glory" heaped on Jefferson for the Declaration of Independence at the expense of "little Adams"—who actually drove Congress to make the declaration.

The first man to subscribe for a copy

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of William Gordon's *History of the Rise, Progress, and Establishment of the Independence of the United States of America* (1788), Adams writes sarcastically in a margin: "How happened it, that Jefferson was an Ambassador, and that first subscriber only a Minister? Oh History! How accurate thou art." Beside another passage he writes: "This Letter was a Forgery. No such Letter was ever written to Mr. Cushing or any other Man by John Adams."

In a book about comparative religion, beneath an illustration depicting naked men carrying some sort of demigod, the New Englander explodes: "Is this Religion? Good God!"

Adams endlessly argued against political theorists who, after the French Revolution, proposed a government without balancing power. Noting the mysterious death of the philosopher Condorcet, clapped in prison by revolutionary authorities, Adams observes, "It was Suicide by voluntary poison. It was an Effect of his own System, of a Government in one Assembly. It was the Fruit of the Tyranny of his own pretended democratic Majority, without a Ballance, or Check, which he abhorred."

Some notes are markedly less solemn. The Rev. Richard Hurd, in his *Moral and Political Dialogues* (1765), describes an "absurd, illiberal, clownish" youth. Adams, a Harvard man, quips: "An exact description of a Dartmouth educated scholar."

Curator Beth Prindle has done a superb job playing up this idiosyncratic personality. The exhibit is organized around a 1768 diary entry by Adams, then a striving 32-year-old lawyer: "I am mostly intent at present upon collecting a Library, and I find that a great deal of Thought and Care, as well as Money, are necessary to assemble an ample and well chosen Assortment of Books. Fame, Fortune, Power say some, are the Ends intended by a Library. The Service of God, Country, Clients, Fellow Men, say others. Which of these lie nearest my Heart?" Ms. Prindle hit on the ingenious idea of displaying some of the most interesting books around each of those themes: *fame*, *fortune*, *power*, *God*, *country*, *clients*, and *fellow men*. In the looming bookcase, meanwhile, are hundreds of other books that Adams interacted with, or argued against, pen in hand. The exhibit marks each with a gold ribbon. The mere sight of all those ribbons, each suggestive of a great man's passion for knowledge, is striking.

That this library survived intact is a minor miracle. Adams deeded most of it in 1822 to the proposed Adams Academy, a boys' preparatory school to be built in Quincy. But—since nothing involving the Adamses ever was easy—the school idea languished, and the books made their way to an old farmhouse, where they were exposed to damp and smoke. Finally, when the Adams Academy opened in 1870, the books were placed on open stacks, susceptible to the tender mercies of careless students and voracious autograph hunters. The cause of history is fortunate that many considered Adams a third-rate Founder whose jottings were of limited value.

That Adams built such an extraordinary library with his relatively limited means is no less amazing. As he lamented to his wife, Abigail, in a 1774 letter, he was far from rich: "I ought however, to be candid enough to acknowledge that I have been imprudent. I have spent an Estate in Books."

Visitors may conclude that no estate was ever finer, and no money ever put to better use. ♦

Thermopylooza

Blood, war, and 'computer-enhanced washboard abs.'

BY JOHN PODHORETZ

Into the San Fernando Valley of Death rode *300*, the strange new movie that may prove to be one of the most influential films ever made in Hollywood. When a picture earns between two and three times more money in its opening weekend than anyone predicted, collecting a $70 million take that indicates its final tally both here and abroad will reach *half a billion dollars* (on a $60 million investment), that picture is going to change the way things are done.

300
Directed by Zack Snyder

What happened with *300* at the box office wasn't supposed to happen, largely because *300* breaks every rule Hollywood has come to believe about how to make a successful action picture—perhaps the studio executives' most beloved film genre because it travels so well outside the United States. *300* has no stars, was helmed by a no-name director, was inspired by a mildly successful graphic novel, and tells the story of a three-day clash in a Greek ravine between Persians and Spartans that took place 2,500 years ago.

Here's one key rule that has been overtaken by events: Unless an action picture has a pre-sold title, it must have a big star. Peter Jackson was able to make his *Lord of the Rings* trilogy with a bunch of nobodies because the books on which it was based are world-famous. James Cameron made *Titanic* with two performers who were no more than starlets at the time because the movie's title told you all you needed to know about it.

But all things being equal, studios either want stars headlining their action movies or want to invent stars

John Podhoretz, a columnist for the New York Post, *is* THE WEEKLY STANDARD*'s movie critic.*

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in the process of making those movies. They want Tom Cruise in *Mission: Impossible III* (until they decide to fire him for jumping on a couch), even though Cruise will cost them in excess of $75 million when all is said and done. They want Nicolas Cage to play *Ghost Rider*, even though Cage hasn't had a hit in years and now sports a hairpiece that rivals William Shatner's when it comes to the willing suspension of disbelief. They will also kick a promotional machine into gear to create an action star, though they're getting much worse at it than in the past. (Ever heard of Jason Statham? He's an English guy who toplines *The Transporter* movies. Oh, haven't heard of him? How about John Cena, a former pro wrestler and star of *The Marine*? That's the sound of crickets you hear in the background.)

The leading actor in *300* is a Scot named Gerard Butler, last seen as a Phantom of the Opera who was so, shall we say, Fernando Lamas that there seemed to be no reason other than perversity for him to be living in the Paris sewers singing "Music of the Night." Nobody going to see *300* has the slightest idea who Gerard Butler is, and even after the picture is over, chances are that 90 percent of moviegoers won't be able to tell you the name of the guy who plays Leonidas, King of Sparta. Millions will see it twice, and they *still* won't care.

That's because they may question whether Butler even exists. To a remarkable extent, *300* is a cartoon. Yes, there are actors in it: Baker and his fellow performers were filmed jumping around on soundstages in loincloths and helmets. But every other thing you see has been generated by a computer—and that may include the exposed pectoral muscles of Butler and his Spartan confreres. I'm not sure any human being has ever been quite as ripped as any one of these guys, let alone all 300 of them.

Computer-enhanced washboard abs? Why not? For *Blood Diamond*, the big-budget melodrama released at the end of last year, the director had his special-effects man add a tear to the cheek of leading actress Jennifer Connelly. You might expect Connelly, an Academy Award-winning actress, to be able to turn on the waterworks by herself, but evidently she didn't or couldn't, and yet the tear is there for all eternity.

Since the performers fade into the background in *300*, there are only two ways to explain the movie's undeniable impact on its audience. One is its arresting visual style, which is key to the successful marketing campaign. It does look like an entirely new kind of movie. But that can get old pretty quickly, and it seems clear that the *300* audience is remaining rapt throughout the movie's two-hour running time.

The other, and by far the more significant, reason for the movie's impact is its story. The tale of Thermopylae has compelled the human imagination for more than two millennia, and it seems that Americans living in the first years of the third millennium after Christ are no different from anyone else. We're talking about one of the most thrilling accounts of bravery and sacrifice imaginable: How a relatively tiny band of Spartan soldiers held off a gigantic Persian army ten thousand times its size for three days by using the narrow and craggy terrain of the "hot gates" as a defensive weapon. Their superhuman labors finally failed, but the legend of their bravery inspired Greece to turn back the invading Persians and thereby usher in the most febrile political and cultural moment in the history of the world.

300 is nothing more than a comic book rendering of that tale—quite literally, as it's slavishly faithful to a 1999

■ "Both Sadr and Hakim have reiterated their support for the BSP and their orders to their followers not to attack Sunnis or to resist coalition forces. This support from the heads of the three major Shiite parties is a marked difference between the current operation and Operations Together Forward in 2006...."

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Warner Bros. / Courtesy of Everett Collection

Rodrigo Santoro as Xerxes

comic book by Frank Miller, whose violent imagery and hardboiled storytelling have now been immortalized in two successful Hollywood films (the other being *Sin City*). Despite the vulgarity and overheated solemnity of its approach, *300* does tell the Thermopylae story without a trace of irony. It depicts Sparta and the Spartans in all their proud, martial, vicious, nasty, unsentimental, and egalitarian glory. Director/co-writer Zack Snyder offers not even a moment of doubt that the Spartans are the good guys—believers in human freedom who oppose the Persians because they demand nothing but submission to a false god-king.

I don't think this movie has a single idea about the nature of cultural conflict, the meaning of martial valor, or anything else. But here's the thing: If you choose to tell the story of Thermopylae, you cannot escape the fact that you are choosing to tell a story of Western civilization taking a stand against rampaging barbarians from the East. And it's precisely this aspect of *300*—as well as its entirely unapologetic celebration of war at its most insanely bloodthirsty—that offers the only coherent explanation for its galvanizing effect on audiences.

Kyle Smith, writing in the *New York Post*, points out that people seeking to draw parallels between the action onscreen and the war in Iraq or the war on terror are looking in the wrong place, since *300* hews close to Miller's 1999 comic book. That is certainly true. But while Miller foresaw no parallel, the audience seeing *300* in the year 2007 is responding viscerally to a story of a clash of civilizations that takes the side of the West against the East.

Because the actors are unimportant, Zack Snyder received no pressure from a top-of-the-line star to adjust his script to make his heroes more attractive, more modern, and more politically correct. There's no way that a Brad Pitt could have played Snyder's Leonidas. The part would have been altered to ensure Pitt got to deliver a speech bemoaning the tragic cost of war. No Spartan would have delivered such a speech, of course, but if Brad Pitt is your Spartan, he's going to insist on it.

And here's why *300* is going to be revolutionary. Snyder and his collaborators had the same storytelling freedom enjoyed by Disney and Pixar and other animators whose films are primarily intended for children. They do not have to satisfy the desires of in-demand actors who want always to appear sympathetic, to act in ways that will not offend core audiences, and to get all the best lines and the best scenes in the script. In a partially animated, partially live-action film, the performers are relegated to a secondary status that liberates moviemakers from the Hollywood power structure, in which stars hold the cards.

In animated features, the story is king—and the stories that work are ones with clear moral conflicts in which flawed characters are called upon to sacrifice for the greater good. Stars don't like playing characters with flaws, or characters from different times whose views on social matters don't conform to our own. If semi-animated pictures aimed not at kids but at adult moviegoers now really take flight because of *300*'s smashing success, the future will not be so bright for Hollywood's star system. But it will give adventurous moviemakers some room to breathe free. ♦

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Parody

"The rules at Oprah Winfrey's ultra-posh school . . . are apparently so strict they make a reformatory look like a holiday resort. That's the word from upset parents, who say the school rules make it difficult for them to keep contact with their children. They would have aired their concerns during a satellite link-up with the chat show queen a week ago, but that was cancelled at short notice by the school's management body. Meanwhile the school seems to have made the rules even stricter." **—News24.com, March 11**

THE OPRAH WINFREY LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

HENLEY-ON-KLIP
MEYERTON, SOUTH AFRICA

ORDER OF THE DAY: 21 MARCH 2007

W. Madikazela-Mandela, Prefect of Discipline

4.30am	Reveille
4.30-4.35am	Cold shower
4.35-4.45am	Toilet
4.45-5.0am	Breakfast - Gayle King Dining Hall *10kg oatmeal* *1 multi-vitamin pill* *350ml water* *2 multi-grain crackers* *100ml coffee*
5.10am	Calisthenics - Mitch Albom Pavilion
8.10am	Morning Prayer - Oprah Winfrey Chapel Speaker: Bp. Desmond Tutu *Giving Thanks for Our Founder*
9.15-11.15am	Reading/Recitation "Phenomenal Woman" (Angelou) "Still I Rise" (Angelou) "Million Man March Poem" (Angelou)
11.20am	Lunch - Gayle King Dining Hall *1 slice whole wheat bread* *350ml water* *100ml coffee* *1 Slim-Fast Optima bar*
11.30-11.35am	Toilet
11.40am	Lecture - Dr. Phil McGraw Auditorium *Teens Can Make It Happen: Nine Steps to Success* Speaker: Stedman Graham
12.45pm	Mathematics Section 19: Quilt Design/Production
1.45pm	Screening - Dr. Phil McGraw Auditorium *The Women of Brewster Place* (1989) Director: Donna Deitch
4.0pm	Calisthenics - Mitch Albom Pavilion
6.0pm	Dinner - Gayle King Dining Hall *2 tablets TrimSpa formula* *10kg Veg-o-Lean patty* *1 slice whole wheat bread* *2 multi-grain crackers* *350ml water*
6.10pm	Screening - Dr. Phil McGraw Auditorium *Beloved* (1998) Director: Jonathan Demme
8.45pm	Evening Prayer - Oprah Winfrey Chapel Speaker: Rev. Bernice King *What a Friend We Have in Our Founder*
9.50pm	Study
10.50pm	Toilet
10.58pm	Taps
11.0pm	Lights Out

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March 26, 2007

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